



DE-STALINISING EASTERN EUROPE

*The Rehabilitation of Stalin's
Victims after 1953*

Edited by **KEVIN McDERMOTT**
and **MATTHEW STIBBE**



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Abbreviations and Glossary of Terms

<i>aktiv/aktyw</i>	group(s) of engaged party activists
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
ÁVH	Hungarian Secret Police
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BSSR	Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
CC	Central Committee (of the Communist Party)
COMDOS	Central Archives of the Special State Commission for State Security Dossiers (Bulgaria)
Cominform	Communist Information Bureau
Comintern	Communist International
CPCC	Central Party Control Commission
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
<i>dvoika</i>	two-person extra-judicial sentencing body (USSR)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
<i>glasnost</i>	Gorbachev's policy of 'openness'
Gulag	Main Administration of Camps
IML	Institute for Marxism–Leninism (GDR)
KGB	Committee for State Security (USSR)
<i>kolkhoz</i>	collective farm
Komsomol	Union of Communist Youth (USSR)
KPD	Communist Party of Germany
KSČ	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
<i>kulak</i>	better-off peasant
LSSR	Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic

MASSR	Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
MBP	Ministry of Public Security (Poland)
MGB	Ministry of State Security (USSR)
MNDSZ	Democratic Association of Hungarian Women
MSSR	Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs (USSR)
NARB	National Archive of the Republic of Belarus
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (USSR)
<i>nomenklatura</i>	list of key appointments approved by the party
OHC	Oral History Centre (Daugavpils University, Latvia)
OUN	Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists
<i>perestroika</i>	Gorbachev's policy of 'reconstruction'
PNȚ	Peasant Party (Romania)
Politburo or Presidium	leading body of communist parties
<i>Pravda</i>	'Truth', Soviet daily newspaper
PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party
RCP	Romanian Communist Party
SAPMO-BArch	Foundation for the Archive of the Parties and Mass Organisations of the Former GDR (German Federal Archives, Berlin)
<i>Securitate</i>	Romanian secret police
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany (GDR)
Sejm	lower house of the Polish parliament
<i>Siguranța</i>	Romanian special services (pre-1948)
Solidarity	independent (non-communist) Polish trade union
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany (West Germany)

<i>Stasi</i>	East German secret police
StB	State Security (Czechoslovakia)
<i>troika</i>	three-person extra-judicial sentencing body (USSR)
TsDA	Bulgarian Central State Archive (Sofia)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<i>Volkskammer</i>	East German parliament
VTsSPS	Soviet trade union executive body
Warsaw Pact	Soviet-led military organisation
<i>zek</i>	Soviet slang for camp inmate
ZK	Central Committee (GDR)
ZPKK	Central Party Control Commission (GDR)

1

De-Stalinising Eastern Europe: The Dilemmas of Rehabilitation

Matthew Stibbe and Kevin McDermott

I think you will agree that there is not much to choose between Russia and Germany, but I think you will also agree that the present regime in Germany must come to a dead end, whereas Russia does seem to point ultimately, although perhaps a very long way away, in the direction of sanity...¹

These words were written by Jack Pritchard to the Conservative MP for Hampstead, George Balfour, on 26 September 1938, four days before Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier signed the Munich agreement with Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Pritchard was a Hampstead-based furniture designer, left-liberal intellectual and anti-appeaser. At the time of writing, Moscow had directed a wave of bloody purges and accompanying mass terror against its own people, and organised three well-publicised show trials, the last of them against Nikolai Bukharin and his associates. While many on the left in Britain continued to support the Soviet system, even after the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, and dismissed as western or ‘imperialist’ propaganda the claims that Stalin was deporting, enslaving and murdering as many communists and non-communists as Hitler, doubts began to appear and were reinforced by the publication of books such as Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* (1940).² Yet in the long run, Pritchard was right. Whereas Nazi Germany went down in the final and totally mad ‘destruction’ and ‘self-destruction’ of 1944–1945,³ the Soviet Union did finally begin to reverse its use of terror and redirect itself along the path of ‘sanity’.

The change of direction was belatedly acknowledged in the west following the leaking of news of Nikita Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ to the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) in February 1956,

but its origins can actually be traced back to the very first weeks and months after Stalin's death in March 1953.⁴ Indeed, in many ways the eastern bloc and cold war 'crises' of the year 1953 – the cancellation of impending purges and the implementation of the first big amnesty for Gulag prisoners in the Soviet Union in late March; the announcement of a Soviet-imposed 'New Course' in the GDR and Hungary in early June; the uprisings in the Czech city of Plzeň (1 June 1953) and in East Germany (17 June 1953) and their bloody suppression; the (non-) reaction to these developments in the west; and, finally, the continuation of West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's policy of *Westintegration* and rearmament under NATO's umbrella after his success in the parliamentary elections in September – form the background to the events discussed in this volume.⁵

Historical overview

The volume seeks to explore the process of rehabilitating former victims of Stalinist terror in five Soviet republics: Russia, Ukraine, Moldavia, Latvia and Belarus, and in six countries in the post-war Soviet 'sphere of influence': Hungary, Poland, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. Key questions that are considered essential for understanding the legacy of Stalinist terror after 1953 include: when, why and on what terms were victims rehabilitated?; what were the main demands and expectations of the rehabilitees and their families, and how far were these demands satisfied?; what were the political implications of the rehabilitation process for incumbent communist leaderships?; why were some Soviet and East European Stalinists able to remain in power after 1953 and/or 1956, while others were permanently removed?; and to what extent were former perpetrators able to evade justice as well as minimise or cover up the extent of Stalinist-era atrocities more generally? Other questions are important too: were communist victims treated any differently after 1953 to non-communist victims of Stalinist terror?; to what extent was it possible to hold rehabilitated political prisoners to the silence and gratitude that was expected of them?; how far was policy on rehabilitation determined by the 'centre' (Moscow), how far by national and local party leaderships, and how far by outside pressures, including émigré and expellee associations, victims' representatives and media outlets based in the west?; and last, but not least, how did East European citizens, both communist and non-communist, react to the releases and rehabilitations, and what political impact, if any, did diverse social attitudes have on the post-Stalinist regimes?

Before any of these questions can be addressed, however, it is first necessary to provide a brief historical and historiographical overview. Already in the first three months after Stalin's death, the number of prisoners in the Soviet Gulag fell from around 2.5 million to 1.3 million, largely as a result of the amnesty of 27 March 1953, which reduced the tariffs for those convicted of non-political crimes. Following several further waves of releases, amnesties and revision or commutation of sentences, the vast majority of MVD camps and colonies had been emptied by 1960, and only 550,882 inmates remained. Most of the close to three million persons estimated to be living in banishment in remote parts of the Soviet Union in 1953 – whether former political prisoners who had reached the end of their sentences, members of forcibly resettled national or ethnic groups, or peasants from the western regions of the USSR deported as *kulaks* – also had the remaining restrictions on their freedom of movement lifted between 1954 and the early 1960s.⁶ Millions of children orphaned by the terror and subsequently brought up in state-run institutions, and relatives of Gulag prisoners who had faced harsh forms of discrimination in the spheres of education, welfare, right to travel and employment, likewise benefited from the post-Stalinist 'Thaw'.⁷

Meanwhile, as a result of petitions from individual citizens or recommendations made by various sentencing review commissions, courts were instructed to re-examine large numbers of political cases, and between 1954 and 1961, up to 800,000 Soviet citizens – some dead, some living – and tens of thousands of foreigners were formally rehabilitated in the sense of having their convictions overturned.⁸ Khrushchev, while himself heavily implicated in some of the crimes committed under Stalin, nonetheless became a firm advocate not only of the restoration of 'socialist legality' (meaning, among other things, ending the use of torture in police interrogations) but also of the release and rehabilitation process, telling delegates at the 1956 party congress that the 'unprecedented violation of revolutionary legality' during the years 1936 to 1953 could not simply be forgotten or swept under the carpet.⁹ In 1961, he ordered the removal of Stalin's body from the Mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square, and in 1962, he personally intervened to make possible the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novella about the Gulag, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.¹⁰ One leading German expert on the Stalin era, Jörg Baberowski, has even described the far-reaching changes brought about by Khrushchev as a 'cultural revolution [and] civilising achievement which changed the lives of millions'.¹¹

Given that the measures outlined above also had major implications for the communist countries of Eastern Europe, and for western republics of the Soviet Union which had witnessed large-scale deportations to the east during the Stalin era, it is astonishing how little attention has been paid to the rehabilitation issue in previous literature.¹² On the one hand, these countries and republics now had to reintegrate some of the prisoners released from the Gulag – those, not few in number, who had a claim to be repatriated or resettled in their original homelands after years of living in captivity or forced exile. As Matthew Stibbe demonstrates in his chapter, this posed a particular challenge to the GDR and its claim to represent the ‘better Germany’ in the 1950s. On the other hand, the East European states had also instigated their own terror systems during the years 1948–1953. In some of the Soviet bloc countries, this involved the staging of high-profile show trials against alleged ‘Titoists’ or ‘Zionists’, and in all of them, the imprisonment of large numbers of real and presumed ideological opponents and ‘class enemies’. The Czechoslovaks, Romanians and East Germans even continued to hold frame-up political trials, albeit *in camera* rather than as public events, in 1954 and 1955.¹³ Thereafter, pressure grew to follow the Kremlin’s lead and end the practice of extra-judicial purges, mass incarceration and overt political repression. Equally, Soviet bloc countries were urged to establish sentencing review bodies and rehabilitation commissions of their own, with some satellite nations – notably Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Poland – proving more willing than others, and one country in particular, Czechoslovakia, experiencing a delayed, but far-reaching, form of de-Stalinisation in the 1960s which failed with the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968. Ironically but tellingly, the only Warsaw Pact state that refused to participate in the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia – Romania – was also the one that had done least in terms of restoring justice to domestic victims of terror. Instead, as Calin Goina shows in his chapter, although three separate amnesties took place in the early 1960s, the country’s formal break with Stalinism was more or less restricted to the years 1968–1969, when selected individuals were publicly rehabilitated to serve the new nationalist direction taken by the maverick dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu.

In the 1970s, the number of political prisoners rose again across the Soviet bloc, in spite of the signing of the Helsinki agreements in 1975. Although they were no longer allowed to use physical force or torture, the communist security services could still harass people, spy on them, blackmail them, collect evidence for use against them in criminal state prosecutions, even have them confined to psychiatric institutions.¹⁴

In reality, a full reckoning with Stalin's legacy was not possible until communist rule came to an end in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yet even now the process of rehabilitation is still ongoing, both in Eastern Europe and in the successor states of the Soviet Union.

Rehabilitation, restitution and transitional justice in a global context

The collapse of a variety of left- and right-wing dictatorships across the world at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries has cast Soviet history from 1953 to 1991 in a new light. It has also raised more general questions about how states and societies cope with the transition from a violent past to what is hoped will be a more just and peaceful future, while underlining the fact that the dilemmas faced by communist and post-communist regimes in dealing with Stalinist era crimes were far from unique.¹⁵ One could mention, among other examples, the human rights abuses practised by various military juntas in Latin America as well as in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the period up to 1974–1975, or the atrocities committed by South Africa's apartheid governments between 1948 and 1990. However, the most obvious point of comparison in our case would be with West Germany after 1949. Here, historians have shown how an initial emphasis on Germans as victims, as illustrated, for instance, by frequent calls in the early 1950s for amnesties for convicted Nazi war criminals and for the lifting of employment bans and other restrictions imposed under Allied de-Nazification measures, gradually gave way to a growing recognition of the importance of facing up to the past, particularly after the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961. In Ulm in 1958 and more conspicuously in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1963–1965, federal cases were launched in West German criminal courts against former members of the security police and SS mobile killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*), officials at the Auschwitz death camp and other perpetrators of Nazi atrocities, with Holocaust survivors appearing for the first time as prosecution witnesses for the German state. In June 1969, the 20-year statute of limitation was completely lifted for acts of murder and genocide committed during the Second World War.¹⁶

By this time the primary victims of the Third Reich were increasingly (although by no means universally) recognised in wider 'discourses of restitution' as being non-Germans, especially by the younger generation of Germans born after 1939. Internationally as well as domestically, this was symbolised by the spontaneous decision of Social Democrat

Chancellor Willy Brandt to kneel before the monument to the fallen of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising during an official visit to the Polish capital in December 1970.¹⁷ However, when it came to achieving redress for individuals, West German law allowed financial compensation and restitution to be granted only to former or current German nationals. What is more, the latter also had to demonstrate that they had been unjustly or unlawfully persecuted by the Nazi regime – not just treated harshly by it. Under the London Debt Agreement of 1953, claims for crimes committed against non-Germans were rendered the exclusive preserve of state governments and treated under the heading ‘war reparations’, placing them outside the jurisdiction of West German courts and postponing any settlement until a final peace treaty ending the Second World War could be signed. Among other things, this meant that it was only after German reunification in 1990 that compensation (and therefore full moral and public redress for the wrongs done to them) could be granted to former forced foreign workers in the Nazi war economy and to non-German victims of anti-Jewish property confiscations. In 2000, the German government and leading businesses finally agreed to set up a special fund for this purpose. However, before this could happen, further legal arguments were necessary, including a ruling from the federal constitutional court in 1996 which for the first time permitted individual claims for reparations from foreign nationals.¹⁸

What social scientists and jurists refer to as ‘transitional justice’ has therefore played a profound role not only in the process of political transformation in Germany since 1949, but also in the reshaping of attitudes towards all victims of National Socialism, irrespective of their nationality or origin, and towards the law itself as an instrument of restitution. Moreover, since 1990 this long-term shift in perspective has become part of a globalised, and not just German, response to the legacy of the Holocaust – especially as the ‘German question’ itself no longer plays a significant role in world affairs, at least in the form that it took during the Cold War from 1945 to 1989.¹⁹ The ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe’, which was opened in Berlin in 2005 on a specially chosen site near to the Reichstag building and the Brandenburg Gate, now serves in effect as an international monument to humanity’s worst crime. Yet closer to home, as a recent report in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* suggests, there are still some issues from the Nazi past that have yet to be satisfactorily resolved, including the question as to whether Germans who were compulsorily sterilised between 1934 and 1945 on grounds of having a hereditary health condition or ‘inherited feeble-mindedness’ can finally achieve legal recognition as

victims of National Socialist crimes.²⁰ Equally, members of the Green Party in Germany have been seeking to rehabilitate victims of the anti-homosexual laws (paragraphs 175 and 175a of the penal code) who were prosecuted in West Germany after 1945, following the belated recognition in 2002 of the legal and personal wrongs done to those imprisoned under the same laws in Nazi Germany.²¹ In other words, 'transitional justice' can delay or prevent, as well as facilitate, change; furthermore, it can help to determine, for better or for worse, who is and who is not to be counted as a victim in need of restitution and redress.

These examples are relevant to us because in Vladimir Putin's Russia there are frequent, and often uncomfortable, reminders that the Stalinist past has not yet been completely overcome, both in the political and judicial senses – even though Stalinism, like Nazism, is now part of a globalised debate about the violent legacy of the twentieth century and the best way of providing justice for victims of state terror.²² For instance, the Soviet-era monument to the victims of the Gulag on Lubianka Square in central Moscow, which was built in front of what was then the central KGB headquarters by members of the human rights group Memorial in 1990, has yet to receive an official visit from Putin.²³ The latter, of course, was himself once a Lieutenant Colonel in the KGB. Furthermore, as Marc Elie indicates at the end of his contribution to this volume, there are still areas of the current Russian penal code concerning offences like 'hooliganism' (used to imprison members of the feminist punk band Pussy Riot, among others) that hark back to the judicial assumptions and sentencing practices of the 1930s.²⁴ On top of this, anti-Ukrainian Greater Russian nationalism and propaganda depicting ethnic Russians as 'victims' has bred a more positive reassessment of the Nazi–Soviet pact of 1939 and a silence about the subsequent horrors inflicted by Stalin on eastern Poland, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Baltic states, including mass executions and deportations.²⁵ Official recognition, rehabilitation and restitution are thus far from a given for Stalinist terror victims even today. However, perhaps more importantly for our purposes, the appearance of new categories of victim and victimhood in official discourses also demonstrates that, over and above any particular national specificities, rehabilitation – and with it restitution or the righting of historical wrongs – can be a volatile, highly contested and seemingly never-ending process which takes on different meanings in different historical and social contexts.

The experience of Eastern Europe since 1953 fits in with this general observation. Admittedly here there were no foreign victims of the 'mini-Stalinist' regimes of the late 1940s and early 1950s to atone for,

just domestic victims, while today – with the exception of Belarus – membership or aspiring membership of the EU militates against authoritarian or closed legal and political practices. Yet, as several of the essays in this volume indicate, this region too is no stranger to the erratic and uncertain nature of the rehabilitation process. Furthermore, the shifting and at times contradictory needs of surviving terror victims and of the families of the deceased, whether for acknowledgement of their suffering and the restoration of their good names, or for privacy and silence, has often come into conflict with the competing claims of (transitioning) nation-states, the legal profession, political parties, the ‘reformed’ security services, the media and other (self-appointed) guardians of official ‘memory’ or ‘societal interest’.²⁶ In this respect, the history of rehabilitation in Eastern Europe overlaps considerably with that of rehabilitation in the Soviet Union since 1953 and the Russian Federation since 1992.

Timelines and chronology

Turning now from the global and comparative to the regional and historically specific, one key overarching issue that needs to be addressed from the outset is that of chronology, or how to account for the differing pace and extent of rehabilitations in different Soviet republics and East European countries, each with their own particular socio-economic conditions, political cultures and experiences of Stalinist repression. Indeed, a central theme of this volume is the importance of seeing post-Stalinist rehabilitation along a multi-dimensional continuum characterised by varying time-spans, modes of delivery, levels of intensity and degrees of openness, depending on particular local, national, regional and international factors. Even if we were to focus on the Soviet Union alone, it is clear that what Tony Judt calls the ‘controlled de-Stalinization’²⁷ of the Khrushchev era cannot be restricted to the year 1956, but rather constituted a series of measures which began in fits and starts in 1953, and was not completed until the early 1960s. Not only in the Soviet Union, but also in countries like Hungary, Poland and the GDR, the intention was to strengthen the socialist system through economic reforms and the lifting of terror and outright repression. The uprisings of 1953 and 1956 certainly slowed this process down, but it did not bring it to a permanent halt. De-Stalinisation was also linked to some of Khrushchev’s wider foreign policy objectives, including ‘peaceful coexistence’ with the west, reconciliation with Tito’s Yugoslavia and the establishment of closer relations with other ‘non-aligned’ nations such as Egypt and India.²⁸

Precisely because it served the new Soviet leader's political ambitions, the post-1953 'Thaw' is often said to have ended the terror without having achieved a full restoration of the rule of law or a complete reappraisal of the relationship between the party, state and criminal justice system.²⁹ Indeed, Elie, in his contribution to this volume, suggests that only one third of former political prisoners had been able to get their cases re-examined by Soviet courts by 1960; the remainder had merely benefited from early release or pardons without rehabilitation, formal acquittal or exoneration. For disappointed West European communists and Hungarian reformers in particular, Khrushchev also had fresh blood on his hands in the sense that he approved the execution of the Hungarian leader Imre Nagy in June 1958 even though, over 18 months after the crushing of the Hungarian uprising, Nagy no longer posed any kind of ideological or political threat.³⁰ The repercussions of 'Budapest 1956' and its aftermath were felt outside the Soviet Union too. In Bulgaria, for instance, as Jordan Baev shows in his chapter, labour camps were reopened at the end of 1956 and the rehabilitation process was put on ice, apart from a brief window between 1959 and 1962.

Yet taking a different perspective and moving along a different time line, we can see that Khrushchev's reforms in 1953–1956 and his renewed efforts to distance himself morally from Stalinism at the 22nd Congress of the CPSU in October 1961 were merely the beginning and certainly not the end of a longer-term process.³¹ For instance, although the political momentum behind rehabilitations stalled again in 1962 in the USSR, Bulgaria and pretty much everywhere else in Eastern Europe (with the partial exception of Czechoslovakia), and although public criticism of Stalin was in effect banned after 1964 under the catch-all offence of 'slandering the Soviet social and state system',³² one source suggests that between 1962 and 1983, as many as 157,000 people still had political convictions from 1936 to 1953 quietly overturned by Soviet courts.³³ Even in Soviet Moldavia, where, as Igor Cașu suggests, rehabilitations of elite victims of the purges had virtually come to an end in 1958, 923 individuals successfully applied to have their convictions overturned between 1962 and 1988, representing an average of 35 a year. Nonetheless, in the Brezhnev era, perpetrators of Stalinist-era crimes could also find themselves being rehabilitated, particularly if their offences were mitigated by service to the Fatherland during the Great Patriotic War. After 1962, and especially after Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, Soviet policy certainly became more hard line in its approach to former terror victims, but to talk of a policy of 're-Stalinisation', as some historians do, would be an overstatement.³⁴

Much greater progress towards righting the wrongs of the past was made in the late 1980s, during the Gorbachev era, including in 1988 the nullification, by the Soviet Supreme Court, of the convictions and death sentences carried out against top Bolsheviks and military leaders at the time of the three great show trials of 1936–1938.³⁵ In total, around one million Soviet citizens were rehabilitated between 1989 and the end of 1991, when claims were looked at for the whole Stalinist period from 1929 to 1953, and not, as previously, just the years after 1936.³⁶ However, even this did not draw a final line under the past or solve the problem of restitution at a national or international level. Instead, post-communist regimes in all the countries affected have passed – and continue to pass – new legislation regarding rehabilitation of former victims of Stalinist terror.³⁷

Typologies of victimhood and rehabilitation

Those seeking rehabilitation after 1953 had been exposed to a number of different forms of state repression. Some had been arrested, tried, imprisoned, deported and/or shot at the behest of extra-judicial bodies (the so-called *troikas*), while others had been assigned by administrative means to various terms of exile or forced labour, and others still had been sentenced in judicial fashion by courts or military tribunals, albeit usually combined with use of fabricated evidence, false confessions, unreliable witnesses and so on. Most victims had been accused of some kind of anti-Soviet or anti-state activity, or of conspiring with the ‘enemies of socialism’ to overthrow the communist system and restore capitalism. However, some had been persecuted for who they were (*kulaks*, members of ‘bourgeois’ national groups and other ‘class enemies’) rather than for what they had supposedly done. Disentangling ‘economic’ from ‘political’ offences was also a very tricky task, especially when it came to issues like currency speculation, industrial sabotage or opposition to the collectivisation of farms, actions which were often punished more harshly to meet the demands of ‘class justice’.

More controversially for the rehabilitation process, some released prisoners had been sentenced as war criminals, accused of collaboration with the Germans during the Second World War or, worse still, of direct involvement in murderous actions against Jews and partisans. This makes it less easy to classify them as victims of Stalinist terror. Nonetheless, as our contributions on the western republics of the USSR and on Poland, the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria demonstrate, those convicted of wartime offences could also benefit from amnesties or

have their sentences reduced as part of the more general re-examination of judicial practices that followed Stalin's death. Countries that had been occupied by the Germans during the war usually had the most difficulty in confronting this issue. According to Iryna Ramanava, in her chapter on Belarus, the treatment of former collaborators and the definition of different degrees of culpability for involvement in Nazi war crimes was also one of the most hotly contested aspects of a new round of judicial revisions in the late 1980s and 1990s, and is still an unresolved question in Minsk even today – so much so that negative memories of wartime 'fascist' traitors are now part of a more positive reassessment of 'Soviet values' and a corresponding tendency to down-play Stalinist-era purges and mass repression.

While defining victims is hard enough, the term 'rehabilitation' itself creates even greater difficulties. In the communist era it was rarely used by Soviet or East European authorities, as it implied an admission that the state was guilty of perpetrating past injustices, including repression of elites and whole social groups. In private, individuals may have been rehabilitated, but in public, the talk was usually of 'amnesties' and 'pardons', thus drawing attention to the supposed beneficence of the communist system. Yet it is intriguing that even in western and post-communist eastern historiography on this theme, it is comparatively rare to come across specific definitions of the varying forms of rehabilitation.³⁸ To redress the balance, we have identified four types of rehabilitation: judicial; political; socio-economic; and moral. We also include the related notion of amnesties or pardons.

Judicial rehabilitation

Judicial rehabilitation signified that the 'crime' and sentence were legally annulled by the courts, the now 'innocent' ex-prisoner was effectively exonerated, and implicitly at least, the communist authorities recognised that gross miscarriages of justice had taken place. This, in turn, opened up the possibility of financial restitution and other forms of compensation for the suffering endured, itself a potential economic burden for the state. This process went furthest in Czechoslovakia in 1968, when a law was enacted – temporarily as it turned out – granting full judicial and social rehabilitation to those wrongfully convicted, including large numbers of non-communists. However, no other communist state, including the USSR at the time of Khrushchev's 'Thaw', went so far in this direction. Instead, cases were reviewed on an individual basis. While this inevitably made judicial rehabilitation a very slow process, it also enabled victims to take part in and shape the rehabilitation debate,

as they were obliged to petition the authorities for a review of their own cases (see, for example, Elie's chapter on Soviet policy). In Poland too, the rehabilitation process was partly driven by determined individuals who demanded to have their cases (or those of deceased family members) reopened, as Piotr Kładoczny shows in his contribution. For those who were unwilling to accept a mere amnesty, he contends, the legal route remained the only path to full exoneration, and an inherently perilous one in the sense that it offered no certainty of success or closure. The same was the case in Belarus, where – according to some of the examples cited by Ramanava in her chapter – judicial reviews could end up confirming the guilt of the accused, even if the original charges were 're-determined' and the sentence correspondingly reduced.

Political rehabilitation

Political rehabilitation took place when the party authorities accepted that the ideological charges against the victim were false and reinstated former prisoners into the ranks of the party, occasionally even allowing a return to responsible positions in the apparatus. This was highly problematic to say the least for incumbent party leaders, because on a personal level, so many of them were tainted by the repressions of the Stalinist period and had no wish for their past actions to be critically examined. As Andrea Pető demonstrates, in Hungary the communist leadership involved itself in numerous contortions between 1954 and 1956 when faced with repeated demands made by Júlia Rajk, widow of the executed Minister of the Interior, László Rajk, for her own and her husband's political rehabilitation. Ideologically, political rehabilitation was also extremely dangerous in that it could easily cast the entire communist project into doubt and raise very awkward questions: how was it possible that party functionaries condoned such gross illegalities and violations of justice, permitted the mental and physical torture of suspects, encouraged contempt for the rule of law and independent judiciaries, and trampled on human dignity in the name of a higher goal? In these circumstances, it is no wonder that communist leaders routinely dragged their heels on rehabilitation. Nonetheless, a surprising number of former victims sought – or were urged to reapply for – party membership, either from ideological conviction and a belief that Khrushchev had restored 'Leninist norms', or because this was the best way of securing economic or career advancement. Others followed the example of Júlia Rajk in seeking posthumous restoration of membership for deceased relatives. As one pro-communist Soviet woman wrote in an application for the reinstatement of her dead mother's party card: 'Judicial rehabilitation ... without Party rehabilitation is still not rehabilitation.'³⁹

At other times, communist regimes even forced through the rehabilitation of selected individuals as part of a reworking of the 'political imaginary'. As Goina shows, the Romanian dictator Ceauşescu literally ordered the posthumous rehabilitation of one terror victim, Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu, in 1968 because this fitted with his desire to rewrite Romanian history textbooks in order to emphasise Romania's distance from Moscow and break the previous all-consuming stress on the primacy of Russia's influence on Romania's development as a political and cultural nation. A broadly similar, although less top-down and certainly less anti-Russian, process was observable in Slovakia where the National Uprising against the collaborationist Tiso regime in 1944 was 'returned to official memory' after 1962, alongside the rehabilitation of several Slovak communists accused of class betrayal and 'bourgeois nationalism' in the 1950s. Among them was the future party General Secretary Gustáv Husák, who had his party card returned in 1963. More generally, the Slovak national movement and the flowering of Slovak culture in the nineteenth century was restored to the pantheon of 'progressive moments' from the past and integrated into existing Marxist-Leninist understandings of Czechoslovak history, with the apparent approval (or at least acquiescence) of the pre-1968 party elite in Prague and Bratislava.⁴⁰

The communist leadership in the GDR had no intention of changing the 'political imaginary' in East Germany, however. Instead, as Stibbe shows, in the mid-1950s it resorted to a quiet and carefully controlled form of political rehabilitation as a necessary step to defend its self-image after the Soviet Union released and repatriated several dozen purged German party veterans, whose stories of betrayal and hardship in the 1930s now threatened to undermine the claim that the East was successfully leading the people towards the construction of a progressive and more humane alternative to West German capitalism. Small wonder, then, that when rehabilitated communist veterans were asked to write their memoirs for the party, they were encouraged to focus on the First World War and Weimar Period, now billed as times of great revolutionary promise and youthful idealism, while being directed to remain silent about the trials and tribulations they had faced in Soviet exile after 1935.⁴¹

Socio-economic rehabilitation

Socio-economic rehabilitation meant a number of different things. In the best-case scenario, where prisoners were rehabilitated and formally recognised as innocent, they had a theoretical right to restitution in the sense of a restoration of confiscated property and compensation for the loss of freedom and the forced labour required of them in prison or in

the Gulag. Yet even if this kind of restitution were not on offer (and it rarely was, at least before 1989), a full reintegration of released prisoners into society at least implied a right to employment commensurate with their skills and education, a right to decent housing, social welfare and pensions, and an expectation that their children would not be discriminated against in terms of education and jobs. As we know, reality was often very different, although Stephen Cohen argues that, once the official formalities were completed, the majority of rehabilitees 'eventually received living space, a job or a pension, health and dental care ... and other modest benefits of the expanding Soviet welfare system'.⁴² This probably only applied to urban dwellers, however, and even here, as Oleg Bazhan points out in his chapter on Soviet Ukraine, the Council of Ministers had to intervene to oblige employers, factory managers and directors of construction sites to hire former prisoners. The fear, which was not without foundation, was that those who remained out of work for a long time would turn to crime or other forms of anti-social behaviour.

Farmers often fared much worse, especially if they came back to areas that had experienced fully fledged collectivisation in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As Ramanava, Irēna Saleniece, and Kevin McDermott and Klára Pinerová reveal in their respective chapters on Belarus, Latvia and Czechoslovakia, returnees could indeed be treated with a great deal of suspicion by former neighbours, particularly by those who had taken over their property during their absence. Oral testimony from Latvia suggests that some returnees even contemplated going back to Siberia, where ironically they were treated with more respect and could live a better life. Likewise, in Soviet Moldavia only a few farmers got their property back, and this was only those who could prove that their classification as *kulaks* was unjustified. Indeed, restoration of property paradoxically took place only by upholding, rather than challenging, Stalinist-era definitions of who was and who was not a *kulak*. Meanwhile, Lithuanian deportees, among the last to leave the Gulag, approached their impending freedom with a mixture of 'excitement and worry' since – according to the memoirs of a Latvian woman interned with them – they knew both that 'leaving confinement was not a happy prospect if one did not have relatives or close friends waiting outside' and – worse still – that 'being expected and well-received was not as important as having a place to stay'.⁴³

The broader issue here, then, is the thorny one of how returnees were to be treated after their release – as fully fledged members of society or as second, perhaps third, class citizens? If the latter, then what were the

implications for further 'dissent' and 'oppositional' activity, particularly from those who clamoured for a more expansive form of justice, including full public revelation of the injustice done to them, compensation for years lost in the Gulag and prosecution of alleged perpetrators? And what about those who were still seen as traitors in the Second World War – for instance, those who had served in special auxiliary detachments of the German army or security police? Certainly in Soviet Ukraine, as Bazhan shows, there are documented cases of rehabilitated 'collaborators' suffering violence and refusal of employment from local people after 1955.

Moral rehabilitation

Moral rehabilitation restored the 'good name' of the victim and formally recognised their innocence, thereby creating a sense that historical 'truth' had been upheld and the wrongs of the past had been righted. It is thus linked to broader expectations about the recovery of the rule of law and an 'honest' or 'open' reappraisal of previous judicial, as well as political, assumptions and practices at the collective level. Or, to paraphrase Ruti Teitel, in times of political transition, what is held to be 'just' moral rehabilitation 'transcend[s] redress to the affected individuals and their survivors'. Instead, it 'is contingent and informed by prior injustice', including, in this instance, the development of public knowledge of the unwarranted use by the party or state of falsified evidence, malicious denunciations, torture, abuse of administrative process, and extra-judicial forms of sentencing.⁴⁴

Moral rehabilitation also raises the potentially explosive question of the guilt of perpetrators, particularly secret police investigators, and whether they should face retribution and punishment. Such treatment, however, was rare. It is true that in the Soviet Union, several high-ranking NKVD/MVD bosses were executed after Stalin's death, including Lavrentii Beria, Viktor Abakumov and others,⁴⁵ and in Czechoslovakia, two security officers were briefly imprisoned for their illegal methods of interrogation. Nonetheless, in the 1950s, the moral basis of rehabilitation was undermined by the fact that many of the perpetrators were placed in charge of investigating themselves, most notoriously in the case of Ivan Serov, who – with Khrushchev's blessing – became head of the newly re-named KGB in March 1954 and made several attempts to limit the scope of investigations into the past misdeeds of the Soviet security organs (see the contributions by Elie, Cașu, Bazhan and Ramanava). Other difficulties included lack of surviving records and evidence linked to names, particularly, as Saleniec points out in her

chapter on Latvia, in respect to local 'volunteers' who took part unofficially in deportations and were often known to have plundered the victims' possessions. Without a proper, independent and transparent process for bringing the perpetrators and their helpers to justice, and with terror victims still 'denied the presumption of innocence',⁴⁶ there was arguably no rehabilitation in the moral sense.

Amnesties and pardons

Amnesties and pardons were the most common forms of redress, but they did not represent 'rehabilitation'. Those amnestied were not declared legally innocent, and hence were still regarded as 'criminals' and lived in constant fear of re-arrest. In Soviet Moldavia and Ukraine, as Cașu and Bazhan suggest, many of those who returned from the Gulag and special settlements did not have formal permission to do so, and their presence in their homeland was merely tolerated by the authorities in Moscow, Chișinău and Kiev. Only children under 16 and youths in full-time education were entirely free from surveillance and other forms of official discrimination related to their past status as prisoners or deportees. In Ukraine, according to Bazhan, public proposals were heard calling on the authorities to put amnestied prisoners to work on probationary contracts on building sites. In Poland, on the other hand, as Kładoczny indicates, the far-reaching amnesty of April 1956 was deliberately used as a (partially successful) means of discouraging individual bids for rehabilitation, the regime calculating that most of the beneficiaries would simply be glad to be released from prison and would not risk their newly gained freedom by making trouble for the authorities.

In general, amnesties confirmed the power and authority of the state and were therefore much preferred to rehabilitation.⁴⁷ Sometimes they were granted to mark special occasions, like the extensive 9 May 1960 amnesty in Czechoslovakia, which was enacted to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the country's liberation by the Red Army in May 1945. At other moments, they were billed as an act of generosity and mark of self-confidence in view of recent advances in the construction of socialism. The East German amnesty of 4 October 1960, announced to mark the death of state president Wilhelm Pieck and the elevation of Walter Ulbricht to chairman of the newly formed State Council, was presented in this manner; in reality, it was a quick-fix measure aimed mainly at reducing the number of 'ordinary criminals' in prisons in anticipation of an increase in political repression (and a corresponding rise in judicial proceedings against 'state criminals') in the wake of a new

campaign of forced collectivisation unleashed on the countryside.⁴⁸ In sum, amnesties were different to rehabilitations, and could sometimes herald an intensification of – as opposed to a reduction in – state abuses against (real or perceived) political opponents. This was not always the case, however, and depended on the particular context.

Ambivalence and secrecy

While the categories listed above are illuminating, especially when it comes to identifying individual, local, regional and national variations in experience and emphasis, this should not detract from the fundamental ambivalence of the situation facing former victims of Stalinist terror in the post-1953 Soviet bloc. Indeed, as Ramanava demonstrates in her chapter on Belarus, one of the key features of rehabilitation, as opposed to the various amnesties and pardons, is that the whole process was undertaken, as far as possible, in secrecy. There was no public fanfare or coverage in the press, the release of prisoners (both communist and non-communist) went unannounced and a kind of unstable hiatus was created in society – or what Polly Jones has termed ‘the uncertain discourse of rehabilitation’.⁴⁹ With no consistent policy directives coming from above, with tentative reform mingling with periodic crack-downs, both ex-prisoners and their families, and society more generally, were unsure about the meaning of the party ‘line’, unsure about the bounds of the possible and the impossible. Towards the end of her study of the Gulag, Anne Applebaum notes that even after 1960, ‘many former prisoners [in the Soviet Union] ... remained wary of applying’ for a revision of their cases:

Those who received a summons to appear at a meeting of a rehabilitation commission, usually held within the offices of the MVD or the Justice Ministry, would often turn up in layers of clothes, gripping food parcels, accompanied by weeping relatives, certain they were about to be sent away again.⁵⁰

The labyrinthine nature of the rehabilitation process, and more broadly the tortuous ‘de-Stalinisation’ campaigns of the mid-to-late 1950s and early 1960s, are important themes in all of the contributions to this volume. Indeed, in spite of the momentous political changes in the Soviet Union between 1953 and 1964, reintegrating prisoners and dealing with the past was an extremely difficult process which involved as much deliberate forgetting on all sides as it did carefully controlled

acts of remembering, truth-seeking and absolution. As we have seen, only a handful of perpetrators were ever brought to justice, while the Khrushchev regime continued to mobilise the myth of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 as a time when all Soviet citizens, and indeed all anti-fascists, were ‘victims and heroes together’.⁵¹ Although terror ceased – and what is more quite abruptly in 1953 – and although the Gulag itself ‘seemed a thing of the past’ by 1960,⁵² the Soviet Union remained a one-party dictatorship with political dissidents still running the risk of prosecution for ‘anti-Soviet agitation’. In 1958, for instance, 1,416 people were found guilty of this offence.⁵³ Moreover, from 1962, sentences for ‘dangerous state crimes’ such as ‘treason against the homeland’ or ‘anti-Soviet agitation’ (which by now could include passing on information about Stalinist-era repression and deportations to foreign visitors) often meant transportation to harsh KGB-run corrective labour camps in Siberia and the Russian Far East, whereas most non-political offences now ‘qualif[ied] as social crimes’, with jail terms usually being served nearer to home.⁵⁴ Against this background, older fears, suspicions and resentments lingered on in the minds of both former victims, still seeking redress from the party-state, and ordinary Soviet citizens, confused by the mixed messages they often received about the Stalin era.⁵⁵ As Miriam Dobson deftly puts it, ‘where ordinary criminal justice practices stopped and political terror began’ was a question hardly resolved in the Khrushchev era. Instead it remained ‘an ongoing source of contestation’ from 1953 right the way through to the Gorbachev era.⁵⁶

The party, popular opinion and rehabilitation

A final salient issue is the attitude of party members and the public to the release and rehabilitation of Stalinist victims: how far were party and popular responses to the liberation of former ‘enemies’ hostile, supportive, confused, contradictory, ambivalent? Judging from existing literature, there was a highly diverse reaction to the amnesties and rehabilitations, and this in itself is noteworthy – notions of a completely ‘Stalinised’ party membership and an ‘indoctrinated’ passive populace need to be challenged. Among rank-and-file party activists and even hardened lower-level functionaries, the dominant initial reaction to the 20th Congress sensations and the early de-Stalinisation measures was one of profound shock and disorientation bordering on chaos. Such responses were certainly common in the Soviet and Czechoslovak parties,⁵⁷ and it is difficult to under-estimate the acute dilemmas that

these reactions posed to incumbent leaders: how to rein in the threat to disorder and internal party discipline while rejecting undue 'Stalinist' repression? The balancing act between persuasion and coercion proved a delicate task for Khrushchev and his acolytes in Eastern Europe, and their indeterminacy helps to explain the 'zig-zag' nature of communist rule in the 'Thaw' period. At the same time, however, there is evidence that communist parties, with the partial exception of the Polish and Hungarian, possessed a resilient 'indigenous Stalinism', which helped to bind the parties together in the crisis year of 1956, and beyond.

Opinion among non-communist citizens was also multifarious. Some welcomed the releases and the return of the victims either as a manifestation of the professed 'socialist humanism' of the regime or as a belated correction of a historic wrong-doing. Others were antagonistic for a variety of reasons: fearful locals complained that too many murderers, rapists, wartime fascist collaborators and thieves had been set free;⁵⁸ believers regarded the amnesties as 'an act of God', having nothing to do with the state; liberal intellectual strata saw no reason to praise the authorities for liberating innocent people; and others still used the periodic pardons to vent their general opposition to the existing repressive order.

Nevertheless, at least in the Czechoslovak case, as McDermott and Pinerová argue, fairly broad strata of the population adopted an intermediate position of 'critical loyalty' to the rehabilitation process (and the communist system as a whole), based largely on a shared class or 'workerist' perspective and a populist illiberalism, whereby many citizens condemned the premature release of middle-class 'enemies' and their perceived preferential access to jobs, accommodation, pensions and other benefits. Paradoxically, while such attitudes were ostensibly critical of the official amnesties and releases, they might better be interpreted as a source of underlying (albeit fragile) affinity between diverse sections of society and the communist regime.

The reactions of the amnestied and rehabilitees themselves also differed widely. A typical mentality, no doubt partly induced by the physical and psychological exhaustion of camp life, appears to have been resignation, de-politicisation and withdrawal into private life. If we are to believe official archival sources, a minority genuinely regretted their past misdemeanours and wished to contribute to the 'great socialist experiment'. Substantial numbers, however, continued to harbour real grievances against the system and sought ways of challenging the communist authorities. Across the Soviet Union, as Sheila Fitzpatrick has maintained, 'former prisoners were both a serious social problem in the

1950s and 1960s and a major source of sedition'.⁵⁹ They were rarely permitted to reintegrate into social and work life, were constantly harassed by the security services and were quite often shunned by local people.

Both in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, even those readmitted to the party elite could not always be relied upon to remain silent in public. In his chapter on Bulgaria, Baev gives the example of Stefan Bogdanov, jailed after the Kostov trial in 1949, released in 1956, but again dismissed from state service in 1968, and later arrested and expelled from the Bulgarian party in 1981. In Hungary, which in the late 1940s had one of the highest numbers of terror victims relative to the size of its population, a politics and 'language of grief' (Pető) was mobilised by the rehabilitated communist and veteran anti-fascist campaigner Júlia Rajk, thereby helping to bring an end to Mátyás Rákosi's leadership of the party in July 1956 and paving the way for the revolution that took place in October/November. And finally, as is well known, in the mid-1960s, rehabilitees in Czechoslovakia played an important role in subverting the neo-Stalinist regime of Antonín Novotný, culminating in the Prague Spring of 1968. More than anything else, we would argue, it is this momentous event in the history of East European communism – with its many 'conspicuous connections' both to 1953 and 1956, and to 1989⁶⁰ – that ultimately lays bare the broader significance of the interconnected processes of de-Stalinisation, rehabilitation and the undermining of the legitimacy of communist rule in the post-Stalinist period.

Notes

1. Cited in D. Burke, *The Lawn Road Flats: Spies, Writers and Artists* (London, 2014), p. 122.
2. On reactions of the British left to the 1930s Soviet purges, see the nuanced analysis in R. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919–1939* (London, 2009), pp. 295–7.
3. I. Kershaw, *The End: Hitler's Germany, 1944–45* (London, 2011), p. xiv.
4. J. Baberowski, *Verbrannte Erde: Stalins Herrschaft der Gewalt* (Munich, 2012), pp. 497–8.
5. On the amnesty of 27 March 1953, see M. Sprau, 'Diktaturüberwindung in der Diktatur? Auflösung des sowjetischen GULag in der Entstalinisierung', in B. Hofmann, K. Wezel, K. Hammerstein, R. Fritz and J. Trappe (eds), *Diktaturüberwindung in Europa: Neue nationale und transnationale Perspektiven* (Heidelberg, 2010), pp. 180–94; and N. Werth, 'L'amnestie du 27 mars 1953: La première grande sortie du Goulag', in *Communisme*, 42/43/44 (1995), pp. 211–23. On the 'crisis year' 1953 more generally, see C. Kleßmann and B. Stöver (eds), *1953 – Krisenjahr des Kalten Krieges in Europa* (Cologne, 1999), especially the introductory and concluding chapters.

6. Figures in Sprau, 'Diktaturüberwindung', p. 182; and M. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY and London, 2009), p. 2.
7. S. F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin* (London and New York, 2011), pp. 28–33. On the post-1953 'Thaw' in the USSR more generally see the various contributions to D. Kozlov and E. Gilburd (eds), *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, 2013).
8. A. Hilger, 'Limited Rehabilitation? Historical Observations on the Legal Rehabilitation of Foreign Citizens in Today's Russia', in M. Berg and B. Schaefer (eds), *Historical Justice in International Perspective: How Societies Are Trying to Right the Wrongs of the Past* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 165–86 (here p. 173). Cf. Cohen, *The Victims Return*, p. 79, who gives the figure of 700,000 to 800,000 official rehabilitations between 1954 and 1964; and R. Gellately, *Stalin's Curse: Battling for Communism in War and Cold War* (Oxford, 2013), p. 386, who counts 612,000 rehabilitations from 1953 to 1957.
9. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, pp. 81–2.
10. Cohen, *The Victims Return*, pp. 93–4.
11. Baberowski, *Verbrannte Erde*, p. 500.
12. There are some notable exceptions, of course. For the Soviet Union, see the literature cited in Marc Elie's chapter, pp. 42–3, note 4; on Czechoslovakia, see J. Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials, 1950–1954: The Suppressed Report of the Dubček Government's Commission of Inquiry, 1968* (London, 1971), pp. 148–243; and for contributions on the Soviet bloc more generally, see Kleßmann and Stöver (eds), *1953 – Krisenjahr des Kalten Krieges*; J. Foitzik (ed.), *Entstalinisierungskrise in Ostmitteleuropa 1953–1956: Vom 17. Juni bis zum ungarischen Volksaufstand. Politische, militärische, soziale und nationale Dimensionen* (Paderborn, 2001); and R. Engemann, T. Großbölting and H. Wentker (eds), *Kommunismus in der Krise: Die Entstalinisierung 1956 und die Folgen* (Göttingen, 2008).
13. On the show trials in Eastern Europe, see G. H. Hodos, *Schauprozesse: Stalinistische Säuberungen in Osteuropa 1948–1954* (Berlin, 2001); and on the terror more broadly, see K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010).
14. See, for example, *Prisoners of Conscience in the USSR: Their Treatment and Conditions. An Amnesty International Report* (London, 1975).
15. For a theoretical perspective, see R. G. Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford, 2000).
16. On the situation in the early 1950s, see N. Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. J. Golb (New York, 2002 [1997]); and on the 1958 and 1963–65 trials and the removal of the statute of limitation in 1969, see A. Grünbacher, *The Making of German Democracy: West Germany during the Adenauer Era, 1945–65* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 304 and 317.
17. R. J. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (London, 1989), p. 14.
18. Particularly useful here is C. Goshler, 'Disputed Victims: The West German Discourse on Restitution for the Victims of Nazism', in Berg and Schaefer (eds), *Historical Justice in International Perspective*, pp. 93–110. On the 1953 London Debt Agreement and the 1996 constitutional court ruling, see also U. Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2014), p. 1197.

19. R. J. Evans, 'Why Are We Obsessed with the Nazis?', *The Guardian*, 7 February 2015.
20. A. Windmann, 'Warum gelten Zwangssterilisierte bis heute rechtlich nicht als NS-Opfer?', *Der Spiegel*, no. 36, 1 September 2014, pp. 40–2.
21. The relevant paragraphs were only struck from the West German penal code in 1969. See K. Tichomirowa, 'Wider das Gesetz: Noch immer warten in Deutschland einst verurteilte Homosexuelle auf Rehabilitierung', *Berliner Zeitung*, no. 203, 1 September 2014, p. 1.
22. For a useful introduction, see G. Robertson, *Crimes Against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice* (London, 1999). See also Berg and Schaefer (eds), *Historical Justice in International Perspective*.
23. N. Nougayrède, 'Putin is Rewriting Cold War History', *The Guardian*, 6 February 2015.
24. The same point is made by J. Foitzik, 'Entstalinisierungskrise in Ostmitteleuropa: Verlauf, Ursachen und Folgen', in Engemann et al. (eds), *Kommunismus in der Krise*, pp. 35–60 (here p. 37).
25. See T. Snyder, 'Putin's New Nostalgia', *The New York Review of Books Blogs*, 10 November 2014, available at <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/nov/10/putin-nostalgia-stalin-hitler>. See also Nougayrède, 'Putin is Rewriting Cold War History'.
26. Teitel, *Transitional Justice*, p. 98. One example of what Teitel refers to as the 'ambiguous, Janus-like aspect' of laws governing access to and use of security files on ex-victims can be found in V. Handl, 'Living with or in the Past? Czech Communists between Canonisation and Coming to Terms with their History', in Hofmann et al. (eds), *Diktaturüberwindung*, pp. 84–100, who shows how in 2006, representatives of the former ruling party in Czechoslovakia sought to alter the terms of the debate about human rights, transitional justice and rehabilitation by 'depict[ing] the loss of pension benefits for the former Communist secret-police officers after 1989 as a breach of human rights' (p. 90).
27. T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005), p. 311.
28. See also L. Canfora, *Zeitenwende 1956: Entstalinisierung, Suez-Krise, Ungarn-Aufstand*, trans. C. Herterich (Cologne, 2012) [originally published in Italian in 2008].
29. Foitzik, 'Entstalinisierungskrise in Ostmitteleuropa', p. 55.
30. Canfora, *Zeitenwende 1956*, p. 106.
31. Cohen, *The Victims Return*, pp. 97–8.
32. Gellately, *Stalin's Curse*, p. 386; Cohen, *The Victims Return*, pp. 110–11 and 128.
33. Hilger, 'Limited Rehabilitation?', p. 173.
34. For an early assessment of 're-Stalinisation', see D. Pospelovsky, 'Restalinization or Destalinization?', *Russian Review*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1968), pp. 307–20; and more recently P. Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70* (New Haven, CT, 2013), pp. 239–57. See also Cohen, *The Victims Return*, p. 127.
35. H. Weber, 'Weiße Flecken' in der Geschichte: Die KPD-Opfer der Stalinschen Säuberungen und ihre Rehabilitierung, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1990 [1989]), p. 9.
36. Hilger, 'Limited Rehabilitation?', p. 175; Cohen, *The Victims Return*, pp. 142–3.

37. Even the East German state, in the last few months of its existence in March–October 1990, when it was ruled for the first time by a democratically elected non-communist government, framed a new rehabilitation law – see M. Weyrauch, ‘“Zuerst geht es um die Opfer des Unrechts, nicht um die Täter und die Rache an ihnen ...”: Zur Erarbeitung eines Rehabilitierungsgesetzes in der DDR’, in R. Eckert, A. von Plato and J. Schütrumpf (eds), *Wendezeiten – Zeitenwände: Zur ‘Entnazifizierung’ und ‘Entstalinisierung’* (Hamburg, 1991), pp. 111–16.
38. The prime exception is A. P. van Goudoever, *The Limits of Destalinization in the Soviet Union: Political Rehabilitations in the Soviet Union since Stalin* (London, 1986), pp. 7–9. Van Goudoever identifies three main categories: formal, public and posthumous rehabilitation.
39. Cohen, *The Victims Return*, p. 63.
40. See M. Górny, *The Nation Should Come First: Marxism and Historiography in East Central Europe* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 2013), here esp. pp. 44–5.
41. One important example would be the literary scholar and one-time activist in the pro-communist League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers, Trude Richter (a.k.a. Dr Erna Barnick) whose 1972 memoir, *Die Plakette*, stopped abruptly in 1935. Only at the very end of the GDR, in 1988–1989, was permission sought, and eventually granted, to publish the second part of her memoir, beginning with her journey to Moscow in 1935 and containing a heart-rending account of her first arrest in 1936, her husband’s death in the Gulag in 1938, her long years of imprisonment and her second arrest in 1949. For further details, see the archival materials in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin, SgY 1380/3 and DR 1/2197, Bl. 151–65. Also T. Richter, *Totgesagt: Erinnerungen* (Halle and Leipzig, 1990).
42. Cohen, *The Victims Return*, p. 76.
43. H. Celmina, *Women in Soviet Prisons* (New York, 1985), p. 115.
44. Teitel, *Transitional Justice*, pp. 6 and 126–7.
45. According to Cohen, *The Victims Return*, pp. 100–1, only between 50 and 100 of the worst offenders were forced to stand trial in the Soviet Union in the early to mid-1950s, with 25 to 30 receiving the death penalty and the remainder serving jail terms of varying lengths. A further 2,370 secret police officers were sacked or demoted. Even the figure of 46,000 posts lost in the KGB between 1954 and 1963 does not itself indicate a thorough or consistent purge from the ranks of those responsible for Stalinist-era abuses.
46. Gellately, *Stalin’s Curse*, p. 387.
47. For a broader examination of the definition, relevance and use of amnesties during periods of political transition, whether as a means of acknowledging and overcoming, or alternatively, avoiding and denying, ‘the existence of legacies of mass abuse’, see M. Freeman, *Necessary Evils: Amnesties and the Search for Justice* (Cambridge, 2009), here p. 18.
48. F. Werkentin, *Politische Straffjustiz in der Ära Ulbricht: Vom bekennenden Terror zur verdeckten Repression*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1997 [1995]), pp. 351–5. Linked to this, in 1959–1960 the GDR faced an unprecedented wave of flights and attempted flights to the west, which only ceased with the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961.

49. P. Jones, 'Introduction: The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization', in P. Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev era* (London, 2006), p. 6, here paraphrasing the work of Miriam Dobson.
50. A. Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (London, 2003), p. 460.
51. Baberowski, *Verbrannte Erde*, p. 506. Of course, this made it all the more difficult to rehabilitate 'collaborators' in public, as officially there was no acknowledgement in the Stalin and Khrushchev eras of collaboration during the war, still less of any participation by Soviet citizens in Nazi atrocities against Jews and other victims of mass murder and genocide. See also A. Beevor, 'Why Putin Should be at Auschwitz', *The Guardian*, 21 January 2015.
52. Applebaum, *Gulag*, p. 466.
53. Hilger, 'Limited Rehabilitation?', p. 172, n. 33. See also V. A. Kozlov, S. Fitzpatrick and S. V. Mironenko (eds), *Sedition: Everyday Resistance in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev* (New Haven, CT, 2011).
54. Celmina, *Women in Soviet Prisons*, p. 71. Helene Celmina was herself arrested in Riga in 1962 for speaking to a couple of tourists, who belonged to the French Communist Party, about Stalin's crimes against the Latvian people, and was later convicted of 'anti-Soviet agitation' for possessing 'foreign' (i.e. western) literature. Denied the right to serve her four-year sentence in her home republic of Latvia, she was deported to camp #17-A in Siberia.
55. Baberowski, *Verbrannte Erde*, p. 501; Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, esp. pp. 1–2; Cohen, *The Victims Return*.
56. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, p. 6.
57. On the Soviet party, see P. Jones, 'From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin: Real and Ideal Responses to De-Stalinization', in Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, pp. 41–63; on the Czechoslovak party, see the contribution by McDermott and Pinerová in this volume.
58. See M. Dobson, '"Show the Bandit-Enemies No Mercy!": Amnesty, Criminality and Public Response in 1953', in Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, pp. 21–40.
59. S. Fitzpatrick, 'Popular Sedition in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union', in Kozlov et al. (eds), *Sedition*, p. 13.
60. O. Tůma, 'Conspicuous Connections, 1968 and 1989', in M. Kramer and V. Smetana (eds), *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War in East-Central Europe, 1945–1989* (Lanham, MD, 2014), pp. 501–14.

2

Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964: A Policy Unachieved

Marc Elie

After Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, the repressive legacy he bequeathed to his successors continued to haunt their internal discussions and intrigues for many years. The terrorist policy of the Stalinist period became a pivotal issue in the post-Stalin power struggles and a decisive criterion in delineating attitudes towards the dictator and his system. Members of the Presidium of the Central Committee (CC) regarded an immediate review of the past as essential, and throughout the decade known as the 'Thaw', the depth and publicity to be given to the re-evaluation of the repressive past and the restoration of justice to the illegally persecuted were central concerns of both the political elite and Soviet society. As a result, 960,000 people were recognised as innocent and rehabilitated – a third of the number of politically repressed as estimated at the time. Certainly, rehabilitation policy was part of the struggle for power among Stalin's heirs: Nikita Khrushchev proved especially adept at instrumentalising the 'ghosts from the past' – party colleagues murdered by Stalin with the consent, complicity or even at the suggestion of his entourage. Consequently, this chapter will pay attention to how the ebb and flow of the rehabilitation policy coincided with the conflictual political conjuncture of the post-Stalin years.

Although born as a political slogan rather than a procedure for transitional justice, even if unachieved and ridden with hesitations and contradictions, there is more to rehabilitation than a mere tool in the power games. First, prisoners, former prisoners and their families readily seized the rehabilitation rubric broadcast by the leadership and made sense of it in their lives. Their written claims and requests and their visits to state agencies not only helped them obtain personal advantages, as usual in Soviet petitioning; but also in a few significant instances

they independently, but collectively, pressurised the leadership to take general measures to solve urgent issues concerning rehabilitation. And so I contend that the disenfranchised and persecuted participated in shaping rehabilitation policy.

Second, even for the men in power, rehabilitation meant more than the opportunity to accuse each other of complicity in terrifying crimes. There is ample evidence that several key political figures, notably Khrushchev and Anastas Mikoian, had a genuine interest in opening up the repressive past and redeeming the wrongs. What they underestimated, however, was that calls for the reassessment of the past would lead to uncontrollable individual and collective ventures, both within the party and outside, provoking waves of letters and cultural products, and bringing the examination of the past much further than they ever expected and desired. Moreover, opening up the past unleashed a significant reaction from the numerous citizens who held firm to 'Stalinism as a way of life'¹ and to the world view it conveyed, and who opposed in their writings, allocutions and mass actions the denunciation of Stalin – and the reinstatement of his victims. Because it could not be entirely controlled by those who triggered it, rehabilitation had its own momentum, and Khrushchev later recalled that he was afraid that 'the thaw might unleash a flood, which we wouldn't be able to control and which could drown us'.²

Third, Khrushchev understood that some degree of rehabilitation was necessary. The Soviet Union could not continue as a socialist society on the path towards communism without getting to grips with its repressive past. The reason for the urgency of rehabilitation was that Khrushchev did not understand the repressions as closed, but as part of the present. For him, de-Stalinisation was vital in order to liberate the 'initiative of the people'. He saw rehabilitation as part of the process of 'emancipation' from the Stalinist straitjacket:

What Stalin had created in his lifetime (when I say 'created' I mean the creation of the cult of personality) literally paralysed the initiative of the people. We had to remove these fetters, we had to emancipate the people and their minds.³

In this striking declaration of August 1956, Khrushchev justified the meaning of his famous 'secret speech' delivered to delegates at the 20th Party Congress a few months before. He saw de-Stalinisation as emancipation, not only from imprisonment and exile, but also from the fear of repression.

Khrushchev's rehabilitation policy has drawn remarkable attention from historians in recent years.⁴ In this chapter I shall provide an overview of rehabilitation in the period 1953–1964, its results and limitations. The focus is on surviving former prisoners, not on the 'special settlers' sent into collective exile on grounds of their class or ethnic belonging (Germans, Chechens and Crimean Tatars among others).⁵ Rehabilitation began as a new slogan enunciated by the post-Stalin leadership to signify a break with the past, and it soon became a policy supported essentially by Khrushchev. It remained incomplete and paradoxical: many judicial case reviews were successful, but the consequent social rehabilitation remained an exception dependent on the former prisoner's personal relationship to the party leadership. Even former party functionaries among the rehabilitated were confronted with general suspicion and the impossibility of recovering their posts.

Rehabilitation as a political slogan

Immediately after Stalin's death, Lavrentii Beria, head of the Ministry of State Security (MGB), ended the last major 'affair' of the Stalinist era. After the war, Stalin had launched a series of intricate criminal proceedings that could affect tens, hundreds or even thousands of people, but that were intended primarily to weaken members of his political entourage. As Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk have shown, these far-reaching attacks were part of the power system created by Stalin after the Great Terror and were time bombs capable of harming Stalin's colleagues even after his death. The most famous of them, the 'Doctors' Plot', was unveiled in the first public act of de-Stalinisation.⁶ In late 1952, Stalin had ordered the arrest of several Kremlin doctors working for the top leadership. At the beginning of 1953, he launched a heinous anti-Semitic campaign in the press against the accused, most of whom were Jews. An editorial in *Pravda* on 13 January 1953 announcing the arrests blamed police and justice officials for not having prevented the 'conspiracy' that the 'doctor-saboteurs' had hatched against senior Soviet leaders on behalf of 'bourgeois nationalist Jews' and foreign secret services.⁷ Stalin's entourage, especially Beria, anticipated a new large-scale purge if the aging dictator decided to punish the political police for failing to disclose the 'plot'. When Stalin died, the investigation was still ongoing: the MGB had detained 37 persons, among them top medical professors, and tortured them into confessing to a vast conspiracy.

In a memorandum to the Presidium dated 1 April 1953, Beria detailed to his colleagues the falsifications and tortures in the 'Doctors' Plot', arguing that it was necessary 'to fully rehabilitate and immediately release all detained doctors and members of their families'.⁸ Thus, on 4 April 1953, *Pravda* published a decree from the Ministry of the Interior announcing that the defendants were 'fully rehabilitated as to the accusations of sabotage, terrorism and espionage brought against them, and ... released from detention'.⁹ With these words, 'rehabilitation' made its appearance in Soviet public parlance.¹⁰

The terms used to provoke a break with Stalinist practices of terrorism had been carefully chosen. However, for the readers of *Pravda*, 'rehabilitation' (*reabilitatsiia*) was a foreign technical term, whose meaning was mysterious. In fact, the legal nature of the rehabilitation announced by *Pravda* remained blurred. Soviet criminal law foresaw legal provisions for the revision of criminal proceedings in cases of judicial error or following the discovery of circumstances likely to call into question the guilt of the accused: those were the provisions quoted in *Pravda*. But in Soviet law they were termed a 'review of a criminal case' (*peresmotr ugolovnogo dela*), not 'rehabilitation'.¹¹ Even in the course of the penal reform of the 1950s, 'rehabilitation' was not introduced in the new set of codes.

Actually, 'full rehabilitation' had already been used in the USSR prior to the liberation of the doctors. It is found, for instance, in the writings of Stalin in 1941 to mark the comeback of Boris Vannikov, the Minister of Ammunitions who had been temporarily dismissed and arrested shortly before the German invasion. Vannikov had not been condemned, but could be 'rehabilitated' – that is, reinstated to his former position and honours.¹² However, 'rehabilitation' had not yet entered official public discourse. It was either internal Bolshevik jargon or a foreign term used synonymously with 'review' by lawyers.¹³ By using it demonstratively to reverse the final act of terror of the Stalinist period, Beria and his colleagues in the Presidium made it a political slogan marking a new era.

Until the rehabilitation of the doctors, the Soviet public had been acquainted with the legal institution of 'amnesty'. Stalin had passed an amnesty to celebrate victory in the Second World War and three weeks after his death, the new Presidium ordered the broadest amnesty in Russian and Soviet history, freeing more than 1.3 million prisoners.¹⁴ Amnesty and rehabilitation are two very different legal categories. The first suspends the prosecution and cancels the legal consequences of the sentence: prisoners and exiles are released, fines and other punishments

are no longer due, and the accused are freed from further prosecution. In addition, amnesty usually means that the sentence is cancelled: justice 'forgets' (amnesia) about the sentence, and subsequent bars on pursuing particular occupations or careers are lifted. In the context of the 'Thaw', amnesties also removed the restrictions on geographic mobility that weighed on the majority of ex-prisoners: the amnestied received 'clean' internal passports, allowing them to settle anywhere. With rehabilitation, on the other hand, the convicted person is recognised as innocent: not only is the sentence cancelled and its consequences removed, but an injustice is officially acknowledged, so that in theory the rehabilitated have the right to ask for compensation and reputational and social reinstatement. Officials guilty of falsification of evidence and other illegal actions during the investigations can be lustrated and prosecuted. Whereas amnesty is an expression of the all-mightiness of the sovereign – who may set aside judicial decisions – rehabilitation is typical of transitional justice in the sense that it involves a reassessment of past actions taken by state actors.¹⁵ In the USSR, prisoners were usually released from the camps by an act of amnesty; only after that would they request rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation was supposed to signify the political revision of past mistakes. It conveyed a sense that wrongs could and would be corrected without, however, dwelling on the legal actions necessary to fully reinstate unjustly persecuted persons. In fact, the terms 'rehabilitation' and its hyperbolic variant 'full rehabilitation' laid a veil of mystery on the judicial, political and social processes that should be implemented to redress the injustices committed under Stalin. Therefore, some historians regard it as an 'ideologeme', an instrument created to mask the legal and socio-political implications of exculpating Stalin's victims.¹⁶ The doctors' rehabilitation showed – at least, this was the effect its authors intended – that the new leadership was ready to correct the wrongs committed in the past. The *Pravda* article even stated that the falsifiers (without naming them) had already been arrested and prosecuted. But otherwise, the concrete significance of rehabilitation remained unknown: would the injustice and suffering endured by the rehabilitated be officially and publicly recognised? Could they claim compensation for the years in prison and confiscated properties? Would they be reinstated in their former jobs, functions and honours? The answers to these questions were postponed, and rendered partially unattainable, by substituting the official legal term 'revision' with the new and exotic term 'rehabilitation'.¹⁷

Transforming a slogan into a policy: Khrushchev's role

After Beria's arrest in the summer of 1953, Khrushchev took up the torch of rehabilitation. His position as First Secretary of the party predisposed him to such a role. The Presidium members denounced Beria not only as a British spy, but also as the organiser of purges and illegal prosecutions against loyal party and state cadres, with the aim of placing the Ministry of Internal Affairs above party and state.¹⁸ Beria's arrest acted as a signal to the public that reform and revision were on the agenda: those party members who had been arrested under his leadership of the organs of state repression since 1938 were entitled to present themselves as victims and request rehabilitation. Hence, Khrushchev, as head of the party, was deluged with complaints from prisoners, former prisoners and their relatives demanding justice as victims of Beria.¹⁹

Like Beria before him, Khrushchev forged his political criticism of Stalin's repressive legacy into a weapon in the succession struggles. By releasing political prisoners, reinstating the most loyal of them to party membership, launching investigations and condemning repressions, Khrushchev reinforced his image as a reformer committed to overcoming the Stalinist past. He adopted the role of main assessor of the repressions in May 1954 when he announced to startled Leningrad party activists the rehabilitation of those arrested during the 'Leningrad affair' in 1949, which Benjamin Tromly describes as 'the most destructive purge of the Soviet elite in the last decade of Stalin's rule'.²⁰ The fabricated affair claimed the lives of two leading Leningrad officials, Aleksei Kuznetsov and Nikolai Voznesenskii. Like Beria, Khrushchev sought to publicise his rehabilitation measures: he used the party as an arena to voice his denunciations and announce the rehabilitation of prominent figures. Most famously, he put forward his anti-Stalinist discourses to delegates at the 20th and 22nd Party Congresses, and in 1956 the Presidium even disseminated his speech 'On the Cult of Personality' to all party cells and to the leadership of foreign communist parties, to be read out aloud to party cadres and *aktiv*.

Crucially, the rehabilitation movement made him chief vilifier of the actions of his political competitors. In 1957, during the showdown with Viacheslav Molotov, Georgii Malenkov and Lazar Kaganovich, Khrushchev seriously damaged them by recalling their responsibility for the repressions. His supporters dwelt on 'their involvement in those atrocities', while carefully avoiding any mention of the role the First Secretary had played in them.²¹ Finally, he formed several party commissions – those of Piotr Pospelov, Molotov and Nikolai Shvernik – to

investigate the trials of the 1930s by studying archival documents and hearing witnesses. The party, as the hub of power, was the main target group of the rehabilitation policy as distinct from the policy of amnesties and mass releases.

The occasional publicity given to rehabilitation does not mean that all measures were taken to reinstate rights to former prisoners. Khrushchev and the post-Stalin executive refused to adopt extraordinary legal instruments to handle millions of files containing death, labour camp or deportation sentences. Among them, several hundreds of thousands of persons had been condemned by extra-judicial punitive bodies: *troikas*, *dvoikas*, 'special boards' and others. Although these institutions themselves had been declared illegal and dissolved soon after Stalin's death, the sentences they had meted out were not. Indeed, prior to the end of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, the Soviet leadership failed to annul the judgements passed by these unconstitutional punitive organs. Nor did the existing judicial review procedures undergo profound change in the post-Stalinist period. Handling several million cases proved extraordinarily difficult within the existing legal framework. The provisions of the penal codes from the 1920s remained the sole path to review cases, but this involved intricate revision procedures on an individual, case-by-case basis.²² Thus, the classical review procedure was ill-suited to meet the volume, range and depth of the injustice: its goal was to correct rare judicial errors, not to cope with mass political terror deliberately imposed on the population of an immense country for at least 25 years. As a result, in 1954 and again in 1956, regional plenipotentiary commissions examined the records of prisoners, but they rehabilitated only 13,578 (4.1 per cent) and 3,217 (6.5 per cent) persons respectively. Despite their name – 'review commissions' – they actually functioned as 'unloading commissions' (*razgruzochnye komissii*) – freeing inmates from detention, but not restoring their rights.²³

In light of these legalistic blockages, leading judicial officials such as Roman Rudenko, the Procurator General, and Anatolii Volin, the President of the Supreme Court, together with influential political figures like Defence Minister Marshal Georgii Zhukov and Presidium member Averkii Aristov, proposed successively in 1956–1957 three systems to radically accelerate rehabilitation. They argued that hundreds of thousands of complaints from surviving former inmates or their families were delayed in the offices of procurators and police investigators. Cumbersome procedures would drag out the revision of their cases for decades – not to mention the cases of the dead. But Khrushchev turned a deaf ear to the reasonable proposals of his closest allies.²⁴

The police and justice services were congested, and the Central Committee refused to reinforce their staff.²⁵ They had neither the authority nor the means to review all records systematically, and in the great majority of cases the repressed themselves, or their relatives, had to apply for rehabilitation. But hundreds of thousands of people had been shot or had died without relatives ready to intervene on their behalf. Further slowing down the process was the deliberate obstruction of the political police under Ivan Serov, Khrushchev's protégé, who succeeded in limiting the scale of rehabilitations.²⁶ This seems to indicate that from the moment he won the war of succession over his rivals in the summer of 1957, Khrushchev refused to bring the judicial review to the next level. The revisions were not stopped, but they continued at a very slow pace within the existing judicial procedures.

It is true that the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961 revived the rhetoric and symbols of rehabilitation: communists were allowed to speak out about their sufferings and Stalin's body was removed from its mausoleum near Lenin's shrine. The publication of several novels on the camp experience also had a profound impact.²⁷ But nothing changed in the social situation of the rehabilitated; and contrary to 1956, the 22nd Congress did not trigger a new rehabilitation campaign, mainly because Khrushchev, notwithstanding fierce words against the 'anti-party group', did not change the definitions of what was good and what was criminal under Stalin. For instance, Trotskyism was still perceived as evil, and de-kulakisation as good, barring the rehabilitation of Trotskyists and former *kulaks*.²⁸

In the absence of a general rehabilitation law, the system could not cope with the enormity of the task facing it. Of the estimated 3,777,380 people convicted of political offences between the end of the Civil War in 1921 and Stalin's death in 1953, the justice system had only reviewed the files of some 1,198,000 by 1960, representing less than one third of the total. Of these, 80 per cent (some 960,000) were granted a review of their case; the others only had their sentences reduced.²⁹ This was in some ways a considerable achievement, given that each case went through the cumbersome review procedure. But it also meant that only minimal needs were met. Furthermore, illegal or extra-legal state repression in the 1930s–1950s extended far beyond what was defined as a political offence in the restrictive sense of criminal law. Most significantly, the rehabilitation policy did not extend to the prosecution of those responsible for the repressions. The arrest and execution of Beria and other important figures should not mislead us into thinking that these actions had anything to do with a desire to repair the wrongs

committed under Stalin against the population. Rather, the party did everything possible to protect its political personnel from charges of criminal behaviour. Those who accused republican or regional leaders of participation in mass repressions were themselves forced into silence.³⁰ The process of rehabilitation was thus decoupled from the assessment of the culpability of individuals, organisations and the regime itself in mass violence and injustices. The solidarity among Khrushchev's supporters at the apex of the party apparatus certainly created continuity and stability, in contrast to the radical reshuffling of the Stalin years – a change often accredited to Khrushchev. But on the negative side, it limited the scope and even the meaning of rehabilitation, because perpetrators remained in important decision-making functions.

The limits of rehabilitation

Rehabilitation policy under Khrushchev was limited to the review of judicial sentences and extra-judicial decisions. It did not extend to the social rehabilitation of those recognised as innocent.³¹ In this sense, the 'full rehabilitation' announced in April 1953 for the unjustly prosecuted was more than a gross exaggeration; it was a political lie. The Soviet government passed a confidential decree on 8 September 1955 containing a disparate set of administrative half-measures to help the rehabilitated. Its main provision was that the camp years of the rehabilitated were included in their job seniority and counted towards their retirement pension. The rehabilitated could thus get a full pension on reaching retirement age, even if they had served many years behind bars. This was not a legal innovation, but the generalisation of a long-standing stipulation following the judicial recognition of innocence. The decree also guaranteed financial assistance to the rehabilitated equal to twice the monthly wage that they had earned before their arrest. There was no novelty here either: this was a provision from the Leninist Labour Code according to which an employer could suspend the wage of employees from the first month of their absence if they could no longer work because of arrest. If they were subsequently found innocent, ex-prisoners could require their former employer to pay them two months' wages. Employers could not be held responsible for wages lost beyond the first two months: they had the right to fire an arrested employee from the third month of detention.³² This stipend was not in any sense meant to be a compensation for the years of forced labour. In the Labour Code it was meant to soften the fate of those who had been held in pre-trial detention and cleared during the investigation

or acquitted after trial by saddling the enterprises, not the state, with making up for judicial errors. Under the terms of the 1955 decree, it was a means of offering minimal assistance to returnees, not to compensate them materially for the wrongs they had endured when illegally detained by State Security, sentenced for political crimes in fake trials or sent to years in the Gulag.

Finally, for those among the rehabilitated who agreed to remain and work in the industrial complexes of the Far North, the years of forced labour counted in the calculation of their rights to the 'hardship' bonuses and pensions enjoyed by free civilian workers beyond the polar circle. What looked like a tentative compensation for the years of slavery in the mines of Vorkuta, Norilsk and Magadan was in fact an incentive to keep former inmates in these inhospitable regions. It was included in the decree as a response to a request from managers who were desperate to keep experienced workers following the mass releases.³³

As always, the 1955 decree was as important for what it did not foresee as for what it did. It carefully avoided four aspects of rehabilitation. First, it did not reinstate to former inmates the positions they held prior to their arrest, or to similar positions requiring equal qualifications and salaries, although the Ministry of Justice had made corresponding proposals.³⁴ Hence, Gulag returnees could not claim to be re-employed by their former bosses. By implying that their downward social mobility would not be corrected by law, the decree openly encouraged the rehabilitated to pursue their careers in the Gulag as contract workers: it was the outlet that the authorities considered natural for former inmates, rehabilitated or not. They were certainly not welcome in their former workplaces, especially in big cities.

Second, one of the central concerns of those who drafted the decree was to avoid creating financial liabilities for the state towards its victims. Meagre as the two-month wage provision looked, it was essential that it should not be too much of a burden on the budget: persons rehabilitated before the decree were not entitled to the two-months provision. The decree wore the inscription 'not for publication' and had a circulation of only 680, to limit its publicity. Former political prisoners learned about the content of the decree by hearsay or from the bodies that had reviewed their case. In short, it seems that the idea that the innocent, who had suffered unjustly, might have a right to compensation had not crossed the minds of those in power under Khrushchev.

Third, the decree did not solve the housing issue: it merely confirmed the restrictions on geographic mobility which the rehabilitated endured. Indeed, the decree did not establish that the rehabilitated were entitled

to find housing in the locality where they had lived before their arrest. Those who had lived in Moscow or Leningrad had no right to recover the flats they had previously occupied, or even equivalent housing there. Like other returnees who had merely benefited from releases and amnesties, the rehabilitated were given low priority in terms of housing allocation and were kept far away from the big cities.³⁵ For example, in the late 1980s, the spouses Dobruskin still lived in a communal apartment in a small town in the Cheliabinsk region. From 1921 until their arrest in 1941, they had lived in an apartment in Moscow, but despite their rehabilitation in 1956, it was impossible for them to move back to Moscow for a full 30 years.³⁶

The fourth aspect on which the decree was silent concerned the *kolkhozniki* (collective farmers). In 1955, the Soviet population was still predominantly rural and accordingly the Gulag was to a great extent composed of peasants. Collective farmers were not covered by the Labour Code, which applied only to employees, and they did not receive retirement pensions. Therefore, they were excluded from the decree. But what about the two-month salary provision? This benefit was actually a financial aid, as indicated by the fact that non-rural families of the posthumously rehabilitated could claim it. However, collective farmers and their families were deprived of it altogether: *kolkhozes* were obliged to turn down their requests.³⁷ The decree excluded peasants from the scope of law and thus confirmed that they occupied the lowest rung in the hierarchical ladder, after the disenfranchised.

Certainly, the government decree of 8 September 1955, the only device of state social policy towards the rehabilitated before the end of the Soviet era, was a miserable expedient. Nevertheless, it was a modest victory for the rehabilitated themselves. It represented a response to their demands and to their inquiries with employers and trade unions. At their new workplaces, they insisted that their seniority be regarded as uninterrupted and that their work-books should not mention either their dismissal or their condemnation.³⁸ Grigorii Danilenko, who stayed in Vorkuta following his liberation and rehabilitation, wrote to Krasnodonugol', the trust in Krasnodar where he had worked prior to his arrest in 1938, to demand payment of the two-month wage and the delivery of a work-book showing 16 May 1955 as the date of his dismissal (not 1938). This was the date of his rehabilitation. Danilenko quoted from the Labour Code and from a circular of the Trade Union executive (VTsSPS) of March 1955. His letter triggered the trust's director to enquire with VTsSPS how to address this strange request and eventually the unions relented to Danilenko's demand.³⁹ Only the obstinacy

of many rehabilitated former prisoners who wandered through the bureaucratic maze finally brought such issues to a point where a political decision had to be taken.

All the same, the place assigned to the rehabilitated in post-Stalin society was at the margins of the geographical and socio-professional system of the post-forced labour era. On paper they recovered all the rights they had before arrest. In reality, they had to fight like other returnees for housing and work.⁴⁰ In this sense, the Khrushchevite reformers paved the way for years of silence in the Brezhnev era. Yet former party members among the rehabilitated enjoyed greater opportunities.

The rehabilitation of elite victims

In most cases, the rehabilitation process was launched at the written request of the victims or their families. Notable exceptions were the 1954 and 1956 commissions discussed above. A second important exception was the rehabilitation of a prime culprit leading to the immediate rehabilitation of his accomplices in the same affair. Given that numerous criminal cases were collective, especially (but not only) those involving supposed 'counter-revolutionary' conspiracies, many victims obtained a rehabilitation certificate by post without having explicitly asked for it. But most rehabilitated prisoners had to file a complaint with the authorities, asking for a case review. There was no special form on which to write the request. The plaintiff's mention of a perceived unlawful sentence was enough to initiate the review. However, expressions of distrust in the Soviet political and judicial system, and hatred, bitterness or other negative sentiments towards the regime, could endanger the prospect of rehabilitation. On the other hand, a letter penned according to the canon of Soviet letter-writing stood a good chance of success. This was particularly true when the plaintiff asked not only for plain judicial rehabilitation, but for party reinstatement and work placement.

Miriam Dobson has shown how the negotiations on the scope and meaning of de-Stalinisation created opportunities for the rehabilitated (or would-be rehabilitated) to frame their life along an acceptable biographical canon. In their claims and requests to the authorities, they participated in designing a narrative of honour, repression, faith and salvation that matched well with the heroic Soviet tradition, and with Khrushchev's understanding of the purges and of his own efforts to reconcile the wrongs as stated in his 'secret speech' and other public

allocutions. Before the right profile of the 'purge victim' had formed, at the very start of the rehabilitation campaign, some former communists refrained from elaborating victimisation narratives in their prison or exile letters to the party leadership.⁴¹ Ivan Mikhailovich Gronsii, who had worked as an editor of *Izvestiia* and *Novyi mir* until his arrest, wrote from eternal exile in Karaganda to Molotov on 27 May 1953 to ask for judicial rehabilitation, reinstatement in the party and employment at a research institute or on the editorial board of an academic review (*tolsty zhurnal*). In his lengthy argumentation, he says nothing of his arrest and 15-year camp experience. He accuses nobody: not Stalin (still untouchable) and Beria (still in office), nor informers and investigators, nor Gulag functionaries. How did he construct the necessity to bring him back, then, if he wasn't a victim?

Gronsii does not mention his past sufferings and injustice. If he asks for judicial rehabilitation, this is not to repair a wrong, but to correct an illogical situation: 'Accusing [me] of belonging to right-wing Trotskyism is such nonsense (*nelepost'*) as, say, accusing the Pope of Rome of spreading atheism.' He insists that he did not recognise his guilt during the investigation; indeed, he could not recognise it 'because I never had the slightest doubt about the correctness of the party line and for that reason not the slightest hesitations (*kolebaniia*)'. Gronsii refuses to envisage that his arrest may be an expression of the party line. Consequently, he rejects the accusation still weighing on him either as a 'monstrous nonsense' or 'incomprehensible misunderstanding'.⁴² Gronsii's protestation recalls the interpretation of the Great Terror common among many communists in the 1930s: even in the camps they kept believing that the sentences were the result of an error concerning them alone, and not part of an enormous wave of mass repression.⁴³

Gronsii does not give voice to the disruptions that the Gulag brought into his life. He builds a biography of sameness: he has remained the same devoted party servant and literary critic he was before his arrest. The reader was to believe that he had not lost any of his professional abilities as a literary critic in 15 years of forced labour. On the contrary, he is full of ideas that he can only achieve with party reinstatement and a literary job in a big city, preferably Moscow. He goes to great lengths in his letters to explain his ambitious project in the field of literary criticism. The discrepancy between his intellectual ambition and the years of isolation in the Gulag is striking.

Gronsii touched the right nerve. Pospelov, former editor-in-chief of *Pravda*, who was charged with reporting on the letter, lobbied Khrushchev to reinstate Gronsii in the party and find him a job.⁴⁴

Pospelov was especially pleased that Gronskii 'doesn't vent any feelings of spite or resentment (*obida*)'.⁴⁵ In fact, Gronskii had written a lengthy statement on the moral and political inadequacy of *obida*.⁴⁶ He began on a lyrical note:

Did I ever RESENT the party and the state? No, never. You can't resent the party and the state, as much as you can't resent the father who gave you life and the mother who gave birth to you.

Then he moved on to condemning *obida* as a 'philistine' attitude incompatible with Bolshevik loyalty:

And, then, what is RESENTMENT? In politics RESENTMENT is far from a harmless category.... Every political worker clinging to resentment, even if it is real or imaginary, assimilates inevitably to the snivelling bourgeois intellectual, better said, the Philistine; and it is necessary to resolutely write off such a worker.

Here, too, the opposition of the military discipline of the party to the 'old bourgeois morality' is typical of the 1930s attitude. Gronskii is resigned and accepts the party rules that require unconditional obedience and blind trust. The refusal to express grievance for the suffering and injustice is an important topos in the writings of former communists. Almost ten years after Gronskii, writer and ex-procurator Lev Sheinin wrote to Khrushchev in similar terms:

I stepped out of prison the same convinced communist I was when stepping in. After my rehabilitation I did not go resentful (*obizhen-nyi*), I did not snivel (*khnykal*), nor complain, but I plunged into party work and writing.⁴⁷

For its part, the party leadership considered it essential that rehabilitated communists express nothing but deep thankfulness and unconditional faith in the party.

Gronskii did not have the victimisation discourse at his disposal that appeared after Beria's trial and the denunciation of Stalin. Gronskii chose to repress his arrest and camp experience entirely in order to appear as a faithful, unchanged communist. Referring to a narrative of classical Bolshevik moral strength and unshakeable faith, he could not present the camp experience as a cruel ordeal. With rehabilitation policy progressing and becoming increasingly complex, former prisoners

petitioning for party reinstatement developed new narratives in which their camp experience became central in demonstrating their character, strength and loyalty. A pool of former Gulag prisoners comprising Old Bolsheviks Alexei Snegov, Valentina Pikina and Olga Shatunovskaia embodied the faithful and grateful rehabilitated especially well. They were reinstated to party membership and worked in the agencies and commissions charged with rehabilitating former prisoners. Nicknamed 'Khrushchev's *zeks*' ('camp inmates'), they tried to keep the First Secretary and Mikoian alert to the necessity of correcting the wrongs of the Stalin years.⁴⁸

As is now widely recognised, returning *zeks* stirred up a range of negative feelings in Soviet society, ranging from vague uneasiness to frank hostility.⁴⁹ Even 'Khrushchev's *zeks*' had a hard time getting accepted in their honorary and public functions; and soon after the demise of their patron in October 1964 they lost all influence in ruling circles. Polly Jones has focused on the specific uneasiness with Old Bolsheviks:

[As] members of the party who had joined in the Lenin era [they] exemplified the precarious balance sought in responses to the [secret] speech. Whilst they represented the path back to Leninist purity, they also embodied a dangerous pre-occupation with the past, seeing their mission as the independent exploration of the Stalinist past, well beyond what the party envisaged.⁵⁰

Although rehabilitated Old Bolsheviks enjoyed special reverence and treatment for their seniority in the communist movement and their Civil War services, they were kept away from political responsibilities, even at a modest level (the small group of 'Khrushchev's *zeks*' was an exception). A Central Committee worker in the 1930s, I. G. Broun spent 17 years in the camps and in exile. At the end of 1954, he was rehabilitated, restored to party membership and returned to Moscow. At 56 years of age, he drew a pension as a former party functionary of 1,000 roubles a month, which should have made him entirely happy. With a flat in Moscow, a pension and party membership, he had attained almost everything a returnee could dream of in the post-Stalin Soviet Union.

However, Broun claimed his right to work at a level comparable to that which he had held before his arrest. He sought a job 'with responsibilities' somewhere in the party apparatus, or a modest position in the Central Committee. His insistence on obtaining a 'socio-political' position bewildered party functionaries. Former prisoners, even rehabilitated, were not usually permitted jobs that entailed decision-making in the

realm of culture and propaganda. As such, Broun's case was handled with great care. The Moscow Party Committee, the Moscow Soviet and the Central Committee Personnel Department received Broun several times. Even Khrushchev, Aristov and Ekaterina Furtseva, all three members of the Presidium, were forwarded Broun's complaints. But the incomprehension remained. Here is how Broun explained it to Aristov in 1956:

In Krasnoiarsk and Norilsk, where I had the status of a prisoner and an exile, they trusted me to be director of the boiler-works at the Krasnoiarsk shipyard and of a mechanical engineering workshop in Norilsk. And I justified the trust placed in me; but now, after my full rehabilitation, they don't entrust me such things.⁵¹

The misunderstanding lay precisely in that, for the party functionaries handling his case, Broun's relevant work experience reflected what he had done as a prisoner and an exile: there he had been a successful and respected organiser of production units. Consequently, they offered him very attractive managerial jobs in the city services: hotel director, director of an enterprise of municipal services or of a house repair workshop at the neighbourhood level in Moscow. These were materially very desirable positions, unattainable for most rehabilitated persons. For Broun, on the contrary, his activity in the Gulag was proof that he could be restored to his former workplace and functions at the Central Committee. Above all, he could be entrusted with political tasks, like those he had carried out before his arrest, because he had demonstrated his ability and loyalty. The Gulag had not destroyed him: he had overcome his ordeal, he was the same competent and faithful communist as before. He was ready to fulfil his political duty as a communist and he refused to be content with the material comfort and mere technical-administrative responsibilities he was offered.

The employees of the personnel departments who offered him jobs grew annoyed by Broun's stubbornness and fussiness. Conversely, the 'courteous tone' of the functionaries who refused to understand his loyal request irritated him. He felt he was a second-class communist, as if rehabilitation had not entirely cleared him:

I feel that they don't want to let me play an active part, they distrust me; they've put me in a special column for the formerly repressed.⁵²

Finally, in September 1956, both parties came to a compromise: Broun accepted a position as a freelance (*vneshtatnyi*) reporter with the daily

newspaper *Vechernaia Moskva*.⁵³ This may look like a far more modest position than hotel director, but in the Soviet system, journalism was ideological work. For Broun, journalism was preferable to managing an enterprise, but it was not the optimum he was looking for, as it entailed minimum 'socio-political' responsibilities and did not correspond to a position in the Central Committee. Even rehabilitated Old Bolsheviks – who, as the embodiment of rightful suffering, were the most favourably regarded returnees – were met with uneasiness if they were not content with their privileged material situation and wanted to regain what they had before arrest.

Conclusion

Khrushchev's rehabilitation policy was left unachieved, in both breadth and depth. Hundreds of thousands of victims were recognised as innocent, but the political leadership did not draw the consequences of this acknowledgement. Rehabilitation under Khrushchev was a patriarchal phenomenon and not an attribute of the rule of law: the judicial and political reinstatement of Stalinist victims was seen as a benefit provided by Soviet power that demanded gratitude, not as compensation for the injustices it had committed against them. The determination not to compensate the rehabilitated was a tangible sign that the regime did not intend to restore them symbolically. Khrushchev's revision of Stalinism was limited. He let the party appear as the main victim of mass repressions, which he located mainly in 1936–1938, leaving the rest untouched. By rejecting proposals to accelerate the rehabilitation process, Khrushchev made sure that it would not develop into a self-sustaining process capable of extending to victim categories beyond those defined by the leadership.

Mikhail Gorbachev re-launched rehabilitation in the mid-1980s as an essential part of his *perestroika* policy. Without rehabilitation, 'perestroika would not succeed', he asserted in 1987. He denounced the Great Terror as a 'real crime', attacked the 'excesses' of de-kulakisation and rehabilitated prominent Bolsheviks Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei Rykov and Mikhail Tomskii (the so-called 'right-wing deviation'), thus going further than Khrushchev in unravelling the Soviet founding myths.⁵⁴ A rehabilitation commission gave far greater publicity to its work than was thinkable in the 'Thaw'. Most significantly, in 1989, Gorbachev decided to cancel all decisions passed by extra-judicial bodies (with significant exceptions concerning war crimes and offences committed by so-called 'nationalists' and 'traitors'). As a result, 838,500 persons were

rehabilitated within a year and 80,000 communists were reinstated in the party.⁵⁵ The rehabilitation policy under Gorbachev also aimed at 're-establishing the good names and the honour of the victims' – here, too, there was a fundamental change compared to the 'Thaw'.⁵⁶ But the material situation of the rehabilitated did not alter drastically for the better, and the perpetrators were not investigated by the law.

On 18 October 1991, Boris Yeltsin passed the single most important piece of legislation on rehabilitation; it remains to this day the basis for the rehabilitation of a further 650,000 persons, including many de-kulakised peasants. It provided some real, though modest, material advantages, and allowed the victims, their relatives and historians to view personal files and Gulag administrative documents conserved in the State and Security Services archives. This positive change notwithstanding, there are still many cases that cannot be reviewed under the existing legislation. Millions of Soviet citizens and foreigners have been unjustly, illegally or disproportionately sentenced on formally non-political charges: for expressing discontent with their work conditions ('infraction of labour discipline'), for minor theft, 'hooliganism', 'speculation' and other petty crimes. Political will is needed to permit the judiciary to revise these cases. But the break with the Stalinist regime has never been fully consummated and, given the reluctance in contemporary Russia to depart resolutely from the repressive Soviet legacy, it is doubtful whether rehabilitation can be carried to completion.

Notes

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1. L. Siegelbaum and A. Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven, CT, 2000).
2. N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston, MA, 1974), pp. 78–9. This quotation does not appear in the full Russian edition of Khrushchev's memoirs: N. S. Khrushchev, *Vremia. Liudi. Vlast' (Vospominaniia)*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1999).
3. Verbatim (non-corrected) draft of Khrushchev's speech to the party organisation of the Central Committee apparatus on 6 August 1956 on the report denouncing the 'cult of personality' at the 20th Party Congress, in N. G. Tomilina, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev. Dva tsveta vremenni: Dokumenty iz lichnogo fonda N.S. Khrushcheva*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2009), p. 573.
4. A. Barenberg, *Gulag Town, Company Town: Forced Labor and its Legacy in Vorkuta* (New Haven, CT, 2014); P. Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70* (New Haven, CT, 2013); N. Adler, *Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the*

- Gulag* (Bloomington, IN, 2012); S. F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag After Stalin* (London, 2011); M. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform After Stalin* (Ithaca, NY, 2009); A. N. Artizov et al. (eds), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie material v 3-kh tomakh* (Moscow, 2000–2004) [henceforth: *Reabilitatsiia 1, Reabilitatsiia 2, Reabilitatsiia 3*]; N. Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2002); M. Junge, *Bucharins Rehabilitation: historisches Gedächtnis in der Sowjetunion 1953–1991* (Berlin, 1999); N. Adler, *Victims of Soviet Terror: The Story of the Memorial Movement* (New York, 1993); A. P. van Goudoever, *The Limits of Destalinization in the Soviet Union: Political Rehabilitations in the Soviet Union Since Stalin* (London, 1986).
5. On the fate of 'special settlers' after Stalin, see N. Ablazhei and A. Blum (eds), *Migratsionnye posledstviia vtoroi mirovoi voyny: etnicheskie deportatsii v SSSR i stranakh vostochnoi evropy*, vol. 3 (Novosibirsk, 2015).
6. Y. Gorlizki and O. Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 19–31, 108–20, 153–9, 169–70. The intrigues of late Stalinism include *inter alia* the Leningrad affair, Zhdanov's death and the attacks on Molotov, Malenkov and Beria. See R. G. Pikhoia, *Moskva, Kreml', Vlast'*, vol. 1: *Sorok let posle voyny, 1945–85* (Moscow, 2007), pp. 168–217.
7. For a detailed account of the affair, see G. Kostyrchenko, *V plenu u krasnogo faraona* (Moscow, 1994), pp. 289–361.
8. V. P. Naumov and Iu. V. Sigachev (eds), *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953: Stenogramma iul'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moscow, 1999), p. 23.
9. *Pravda*, 4 April 1953, p. 2.
10. After Stalin's death and prior to the doctors' release, the Presidium had already reinstated to the party important victims of Stalin's last sinuous affairs: Molotov's wife, Polina Zhemchuzhina, and two of Beria's close assistants, Naum Eitingon and Nikolai Selivanovskii. All three had been arrested as 'Jewish nationalists'. The term 'rehabilitation' in relation to Zhemchuzhina appears in a memorandum of May 1953. *Reabilitatsiia 1*, pp. 15, 41–3; V. N. Khaustov, *Delo Beriia: Prigovor obzhalovaniuu ne podlezhit* (Moscow, 2012), pp. 239–40 and 725.
11. See the carefully researched history of 'rehabilitation' in the pre-revolutionary and Soviet legal contexts in V. S. Tol'ts and E. Iu. Zubkova (eds), *XX s"ezd: Informatsionno-obrazovatel'nyi proekt* [CD-Rom] (Moscow, 2003).
12. 'Boris Vannikov', *Soldaty XX veka*, <http://wwii-soldat.narod.ru/NARKOMY/ARTICLES/006-vannikov.htm> (accessed 1 May 2014).
13. On 2 July 1953, Beria wrote a final letter to his former Presidium colleagues, now his executioners: '[omrade] Malenkov and [omrade] Khrushchev, ... what harm would there be in rehabilitating a comrade [?]', *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, p. 81. Here, 'rehabilitate' has the same meaning as that of Stalin's in the case of Vannikov.
14. M. Elie, 'Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag: Amnisties et réhabilités dans la région de Novosibirsk, 1953–1960', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, vol. 47, no. 1–2 (2006), pp. 327–48.
15. R. G. Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford, 2000).
16. Tol'ts and Zubkova et al. (eds), *XX s"ezd*.

17. Ibid.
18. Information on the trial and execution of Beria published in *Pravda* on 24 December 1953 as reproduced in *Lavrentii Beria*, 1953, pp. 387–90.
19. Some of these letters, including from relatives, are published in *Reabilitatsiia 1*, pp. 60, 62–3, 66–9, 79–81, 90–2; Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, p. 65.
20. *Reabilitatsiia 1*, pp. 129–42. On the 'Leningrad affair', see B. Tromly, 'The Leningrad Affair and Soviet Patronage Politics, 1949–1950', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 56, no. 5 (2004), pp. 707–29.
21. See Aristov's speech in N. Kovaleva (ed.), *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957* (Moscow 1998), p. 188.
22. A procedure introduced in 1953 to organise the review of cases dealt with by extra-judicial bodies was actually more cumbersome than the provisions of the Codes. M. Elie, 'Les anciens détenus du Goulag: Libérations massives, réinsertion et réhabilitation dans l'URSS poststalinienne, 1953–1964', PhD thesis, École des hautes études en sciences sociales (Paris, 2007), pp. 325–9.
23. The expression is used by A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, vol. 3 (New York, 1997), p. 489. O. Lavinskaia, 'Dokumenty prokuratury o protsesse reabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh repressii v 1954–1956 gg', *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, no. 3 (2007), pp. 38–46. M. Elie, 'Unmögliche Rehabilitation. Die Revisionskommissionen 1956 und die Unsicherheiten des Tauwetters', *Osteuropa*, vol. 57, no. 6 (2007), pp. 369–86.
24. *Reabilitatsiia 2*, pp. 111–13 and 241–4. Draft memo by Aristov and Rudenko to the CC prior to 4 February 1957 suggesting the creation of a network of commissions to accelerate the rehabilitation process, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. R-8131, op. 32, d. 5066, ll. 123–29ob. Draft of a memo by Aristov, Zolotukhin, Volin and Baranov to the CC, 1956, GARF f. R-8131, op. 32, d. 5066, ll. 130–3.
25. Mishutin, Deputy Procurator General to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, 28 January 1957, on job cuts and other measures taken by the Procuracy to reduce costs between 1955 and end of 1956, GARF f. R-8131, op. 32, d. 5065, l. 13; Rudenko to CC, 18 June 1959, on Deputy Procurator General Salin leaving, GARF R-8131, op. 32, d. 6190, l. 281.
26. See, for instance, Salin to Savchenko, Deputy Chairman of the KGB, 10–12 July 1954, GARF f. R-8131, op. 32, d. 3731, ll. 200–1; Serov to Rudenko, 1 April 1957, in *Reabilitatsiia 2*, pp. 244–6, here 244.
27. D. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*; M. Dobson, 'Contesting the Paradigms of De-Stalinization: Readers' Responses to *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*', *Slavic Review*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2005), pp. 580–600.
28. On the 22nd congress, see Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, Chapter 7.
29. The number of victims repressed for 'counter-revolutionary crimes' was calculated by the Procurator General, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Justice on 1 February 1954. See A. Kokurin and N. Petrov (eds), *GULAG: Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei, 1917–1960* (Moscow, 2000), p. 147. The number of rehabilitated was given by the Supreme Court on 16 May 1961. See GARF f. R-7523, op 95a, d. 59, ll. 166–8.
30. In Armenia, for example, Suren Tovmasian and Shmavon Arushanian came under heavy criticism for their roles in the Great Terror and the deportations

- of the 1940s. In addition, they were accused of slowing down rehabilitation. Moscow, however, sided with the two heavily compromised leaders against the rank-and-file. Both made brilliant careers and their opponents were silenced. Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), f. 5, op. 30, d. 185, ll. 46–9 (16 June 1956) and 68–78 (14 September 1956).
31. On the difference between judicial and social rehabilitation, see van Goudoever, *The Limits of Destalinization*, pp. 7–8.
32. *Osnovnye zakonodatel'nye akty o trude rabochikh i sluzhashchikh* (Moscow, 1953), pp. 24, 30, 98–104.
33. Shirvinskii, Deputy Justice Minister of the USSR, to P. V. Furduev, Deputy Chairman of the State Economic Commission of the USSR Council of Ministers, 17 December 1955, GARF f. R-9492, op. 2, d. 111, ll. 88–94.
34. Minister of Justice Konstantin Gorshenin to the Trade Unions executive (VTsSPS), 14 March 1955, GARF f. R-5451, op. 43, d. 1220, ll. 25–6.
35. Elie, 'Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag'.
36. *Reabilitatsiia* 3, p. 182.
37. Salin to Chekalov, Procurator of Smolensk region, on the inapplicability of the decree to *kolkhoz* peasants, GARF f. R-8131, op. 32, d. 4847, ll. 9–10.
38. Correspondence between the trade unions of the Leningrad region and VTsSPS, 13 and 29 January 1955 on the job seniority of the rehabilitated, GARF f. R-5451, op. 43, d. 1220, ll. 2–3.
39. Krasnodonugol' to Ministry of Coal Industry and VTsSPS on Danilenko's demand, undated, between 16 May and 13 September 1955, GARF f. R-5451, op. 43, d. 1220, l. 91. On the rehabilitated in Vorkuta, see Barenberg, *Gulag Town*, Chapter 6.
40. Elie, 'Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag'.
41. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, pp. 65–77, 207.
42. RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 36, ll. 56–60 (21 January 1954).
43. N. Werth, *Les procès de Moscou: 1936–1938* (Brussels, 2006), pp. 174–5.
44. *Reabilitatsiia* 1, pp. 88–9.
45. RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 36, ll. 53–6 (original). A copy can be found in *Reabilitatsiia* 1, pp. 88–9.
46. RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 36, ll. 47–52.
47. RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 402, ll. 36–7 (7 February 1962).
48. Cohen, *The Victims Return*, pp. 89–90; Adler, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 128–34.
49. This is a main finding of Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*. See also Elie, 'Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag'.
50. Jones, 'From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin', pp. 43–4.
51. Broun to Aristov, 17 April 1956, RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 54, l. 29.
52. RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 54, l. 29.
53. Bureau of the CC for the RSFSR to CC of the CPSU, 28 September 1956, RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 54, l. 40.
54. *Reabilitatsiia* 2, pp. 17–21.
55. Adler, *Keeping Faith*, p. 184.
56. 'The good name of almost one million persons has been re-established.' See the speech of Aleksandr Iakovlev to the 28th Party Congress, 2 July 1990, published in *Reabilitatsiia* 3, pp. 507–8.

3

De-Stalinisation in Hungary from a Gendered Perspective: The Case of Júlia Rajk

Andrea Pető

‘Grief is the common language of humanity,’ commented Radio Free Europe on 6 October 1956 at the time of the reburial of László Rajk, the hardline communist Minister of the Interior in Hungary, who was executed as an alleged ‘Titoist’ after a show trial in 1949.¹ In this chapter, I analyse two unique features of the process of de-Stalinisation in Hungary. The first is its timing: the process began much earlier than in any other eastern bloc country, and indeed almost immediately after the death of Stalin, with the appointment of a reformist, Imre Nagy (1896–1958), as Prime Minister in July 1953.² The second is the key role played in the process by a woman, namely Júlia Rajk (1914–1981), László Rajk’s widow. The two processes are linked, as Júlia Rajk and her husband belonged to a privileged group in post-1945 Hungarian society, having been prominent members of Hungary’s underground communist movement in the 1930s and early 1940s. Yet this influential couple, and their infant son, fell victim to the first Soviet-style show trial in Hungary in 1949.

Júlia Rajk, born as Júlia Földes in 1914, grew up in Budapest in a working-class family that had strong communist traditions.³ In the 1930s she lived for a while in Paris and became active in promoting Red Aid for Spain. She re-entered Hungary at the beginning of the Second World War and worked illegally for the party, before being arrested, with her husband, by police loyal to the fascist Arrow Cross regime in December 1944. Between 1945 and 1949, as the wife of László Rajk, who had also been a legendary leader in the Spanish Civil War, Júlia Rajk (known in Hungary as Rajk Lászlóné or Mrs László Rajk) became a leading functionary in the communist-controlled Democratic Association of Hungarian Women (MNDSZ). In a trial that took place in March 1950, nine months after her arrest, she received a five-year prison sentence,

having been convicted of supporting her husband's so-called 'subversive policy'. On completion of her sentence, she was released from prison in June 1954 as Györk Lászlóné (Mrs László Györk). She signed her subsequent appeals to the leaders of the Hungarian communist party requesting official rehabilitation using both names – Rajk Lászlóné and Györk Lászlóné. The son of Júlia and László, also called László, was a five-month-old baby when his mother was arrested in June 1949. The infant was taken to an orphanage and renamed István Kovács, the most common name in Hungary. After László Rajk's reburial on 6 October 1956, Júlia regained the right to use her married name (Mrs László Rajk) and her son once again became László Rajk Jr.

Two names and two personalities in post-1945 Hungarian history became taboo subjects. The first was Júlia's executed husband, László Rajk (1909–1949), who was posthumously rehabilitated and reburied in 1955–1956. The second was Imre Nagy, who, having lost office in April 1955, served again as Hungarian Prime Minister during the Revolution of October–November 1956. Nagy was executed as a traitor in 1958 and buried in an unmarked grave; his reburial in 1989 marked the end of communism in Hungary. The link in the public mind between the two names is based in part on the high-profile political role played by Júlia Rajk. Like Nagy, she took refuge in the Yugoslav embassy on 4 November 1956, and was part of the group removed to Romania after the completion of the Soviet invasion, although, luckily for her, she did not face any criminal charges in relation to the events of 1956. She was granted permission to return to Hungary in October 1958, and gradually became a key figure in the opposition movement, demanding the rehabilitation of Nagy and his fellow martyrs.

The most striking aspect of Júlia Rajk's life, however, was her relentless insistence on achieving her husband's unconditional political rehabilitation. This moral human achievement is all the more remarkable given that it was founded on Júlia's capacity for self-effacement and her refusal to dwell on her own plight. As she lacked any formal power within the party, her mastery of the universal 'language of grief' played a crucial role in spurring decision-makers in the nomenclature into action. The 'language of grief' is first and foremost a women's language, and this gave Rajk her confidence. Standing up for her executed husband gave meaning to her own years in prison. As a wife fighting for the honourable burial of her husband, she was also raised above the controversies and dividing lines of Hungarian politics more generally. The struggle, however, did not end with the graveside photograph of Júlia accompanied by her son, taken at her husband's reburial at the

Kerepesi cemetery in Budapest and published in the international press. The fact that a reburial was held inspired the leaders of the Hungarian Revolution, who saw how it was possible, using the telephone, to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people for a 'cause'. The implacability of Júlia Rajk and her insistence on the broadest publicity for her husband's reburial on 6 October 1956 rendered the event a psychological dress rehearsal for the 1956 Revolution.

In later periods too, Júlia Rajk campaigned consistently for the full rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinist terror. However, the victims for whom she fought had all belonged to one or another branch of the Hungarian labour movement, whether as communists, social democrats or unaligned 'progressives', and all of them had been subjected to the unlawful actions of the regime in the period of 'high Stalinism' between 1949 and 1953. The victims of political terror in the years 1945–1948, which had seen the complete replacement of Hungary's political elite, the nationalisation of its industry and commerce, the persecution of leading figures in the Church, the repression of anti-regime elements linked to the army or the middle-class Smallholders' Party, and trials of alleged economic 'saboteurs', lay outside her area of interest.⁴

In this chapter, I shall first briefly explore the life of Júlia Rajk, and then turn to the history of the rehabilitation process in Hungary up until the crucially important reburial of László Rajk. I shall show how Júlia Rajk utilised the 'language of grief' in her relentless struggle against two key political figures in post-war Hungarian history: Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971), who was General Secretary of the Hungarian communist party from February 1945 to July 1956; and János Kádár (1912–1989), Minister of the Interior from 1948 to 1950 and himself a victim of the purges, who spent the years 1951 to 1954 in jail, only to be released, rehabilitated and elevated to the posts of party General Secretary (on 24 October 1956) and Prime Minister in place of Nagy (after the Soviet invasion on 4 November 1956). Both men personally sabotaged any real attempts to work through the past, including their own shadowy roles in the Rajk trial and related abuses of state power. They could do so only as long as they could argue that confronting the crimes of the past would merely assist the enemies of communism.

The struggle for her own rehabilitation

Júlia Rajk could not believe she was being set free when, on 14 June 1954, at the end of her five-year sentence, she was taken from her cell to the prison gates. After her release, with an identity card issued in the

name of Mrs László Györk, she began a new life. She had nothing, as all her property had been confiscated. On 8 July 1954, the Ministry of the Interior ordered its Department of Investigations to conduct a review into the case of Mrs László Rajk.⁵ To proceed with an appeal hearing, the documentation from the 1950 trial was required. However, 'despite a diligent search of the operational records at the Ministry of the Interior, the official record could not be found', so the investigators had 'no option but to reconstruct it'.⁶ In other words, all the official papers and documents that the court needed to see before it could consent to an appeal were missing. Witnesses later complained that at the new trial in 1955, they were put under pressure to say things, just as they had been in 1949.⁷

The case review was concluded on 9 September 1954 with the finding that the original conviction was unsafe. In his summing up on 14 September 1954, Kálmán Czakó, the Chief Public Prosecutor, drew the following conclusion: 'We have further established that Mrs László Rajk could not have taken part in the conspiracy organised by her husband, as there was no such conspiracy, and none of the people questioned had any knowledge of it, whereby Mrs László Rajk could not have known about it either.'⁸ In a report dated 24 September 1954, Czakó recommended an appeal hearing for the former MNDSZ functionary Mrs László Rajk, merging the case with two others, namely the case of Márta Tauszky, who remained in detention and would later be convicted of espionage, and the case of the industrial turner Imre Gayer, who had already been executed. The manner of the review procedure was just as impersonal and humiliating as the original court hearing. Neither the original hearing nor the review into it made reference to the nature of the case. The official application for an appeal hearing stated dryly that Mrs László Rajk had served her sentence and that her 'acquittal was to be expected'. It also indicated that witnesses named Boris Fáj, Károlyné Döbrentei and Ervin Faludi, the first two former colleagues of Júlia Rajk and the latter a former police interrogator, would be called to give evidence.⁹ A copy of each of these reports was submitted to Rákosi's secretariat, which was closely monitoring developments.¹⁰

The appeal hearing began on 12 October 1954 and ended on 26 July 1955, when a closed session of the Special Council of the Supreme Court, citing lack of evidence, acquitted Mrs László Rajk of taking part in a conspiracy to overthrow the people's democratic state order. In its grounds for the verdict, the court noted that in the original case, both the police and the court had proceeded in an unlawful fashion. It also acknowledged that with respect to her work for the MNDSZ, 'no more than a distant link can be made with the acts mentioned in the

indictment'.¹¹ However, the veracity of the two witness statements that were said to be 'indifferent' was upheld. Indeed, the witnesses repeated word for word the statements that they had made in 1949, according to which Mrs László Rajk's work in the MNDSZ had been less than adequate; in fact, her performance was branded a failure.¹² In another humiliation, she was asked by the prosecutor whether it was true that on hearing of Rajk's death she had welcomed the news, as it meant she would get his watch. Júlia, with her experience of prison life, knew that watches were the objects that disappeared first.¹³ Thus, although she received a legal rehabilitation, it did not amount to a moral or political one. People were dissatisfied with the appeal hearing, and regarded it as being no less defective than the original show trial.

Beyond the appeal hearing, rehabilitation was a slow and gradual process. Mrs László Rajk continuously bombarded party comrades with letters, requesting a resolution of 'the matter'. The 'matter' in question was the restoration of her party membership, which turned out to be a good choice of approach for several reasons. Party membership was a 'sacred' issue: it was subject to the judgement of fellow communists, the only valid reference group in the eyes of loyal party members. Júlia also knew how she could influence this decision-making group by way of her political contacts. As a reinstated party member, she could make better use of her policy of 'being personally present', for in her person and by way of her person she was living evidence that crimes had been committed by the Rákosi regime between 1949 and 1953. It is no surprise to learn that letters from Mrs Rajk and encounters with her so alarmed communist functionaries that they duly filed reports to their superiors.

This is what happened on 17 August 1955, when, at a personal meeting, communist official Lajos Ács handed Mrs László Rajk her renewed party membership card, while nonetheless informing her that she had received a severe reprimand. Such disciplinary measures were no joke – the party statutes determined exactly who could be reprimanded and at what forum. In such cases, the 'culprit' was entitled to attend the disciplinary meeting. In Júlia's case, however, a formal error had occurred. As Ács informed her, she had been reprimanded for failing to tell the party that in late 1944, while she and her husband were being held prisoner by the Arrow Cross, László Rajk had denied his communist past. This accusation repeated the false logic of the 1949 show trial, because it was clear to everyone that Júlia could not have been present in person when her husband allegedly made the statement in question. Mrs Rajk could not be intimidated. In a letter to the Central Party

Control Commission (CPCC), dated 18 August 1955, she demanded a full public hearing so that she could prove – with witnesses – that she had been telling the truth. For the CPCC, another public hearing was the least attractive option. However, for Júlia, who had considerable experience of ‘Kremlinology’, the tone and content of Ács’s message indicated that her struggle was far from over, as ‘given the manner of the “rehabilitation” of my husband, *Comrade* László Rajk [she considered it important to emphasise the comrade part, but the italics are mine, A. P.], it is now clear to the entire international working class that, in place of the trumped-up charges, further accusations – ones that have already been made in the past [concerning events in 1944] – are to be brought against him’.

At the fateful meeting with Ács on 17 August 1955, Júlia fought tooth and nail for her cause: she expressed her ‘indescribable joy, relief and pride at becoming a party member once again’. Party membership also meant protection: ‘Now that I have been returned my party membership card, I consider it my communist obligation to fight for the party in an even more consistent and determined manner than before.’¹⁴ Probably, it was this that most worried the party leaders, who were rather fearful of meetings with her, and sought, where possible, to delegate the task of talking with her to subordinates. For her part, Júlia did not expect to receive any favours or good-will from the party, even if it did quietly rescind the decision to reprimand her. In her ongoing battle for justice, she looked for and found allies among those repressed leftists and party veterans who supported the process of working through the past.

The rehabilitation of László Rajk

At her appeal hearing in July 1955, Júlia made use of her right to the last word to highlight three goals: ‘I ask that my husband László Rajk be rehabilitated, that I should be allowed to bury my husband, and that my son be given back his real name.’¹⁵ Yet her most important demand was the following: ‘My wish and my request is that my name be restored to me.’¹⁶ The fight to win back her name was part of the struggle to rehabilitate László Rajk; its outcome would determine not only Júlia’s own fate and that of her son, but also the fate of the whole country.

Securing full moral and political rehabilitation was no easy task, however. The case of László Rajk had fundamentally altered the communist party apparatus’s outlook on life. Members of the party apparatus were initially made to believe that Rajk had been a traitor. Now they were being told that this had not been the case. Perhaps the best

way to illustrate the party apparatus's distorted perception of Rajk in the mid-1950s is to cite the generally held opinion that he was guilty of deliberate deception because he had falsely confessed to the charges against him during his trial in September 1949 and had thus misled thousands of loyal party workers. Rajk's apparent submissiveness would subsequently be addressed by Júlia in an essay published in 1969.¹⁷ Until that time, however, she had to sit through the appeal hearings, which continued to search relentlessly for suspicious events in the life of her executed husband.

The Department of Investigations of the Ministry of the Interior began its review of the Rajk case on 3 May 1954. It reported on its actions on an ongoing basis to the Department of Special Affairs of the Chief Public Prosecutor, Czakó. An official inquiry was ordered by the Minister of the Interior, László Piros, on 9 July 1954. The reports examined the veracity of various witness statements made in the case, but the drafters of the reports received no guidance as to a 'new concept or strategy', and thus they awaited instructions. Most of the cadres working on the review were trusted members of the old guard. A report dated 3 September 1954 examined whether or not László Rajk had worked as a police informer under the pre-war, anti-communist Horthy regime, following his first arrest in 1931.¹⁸ An investigation of this issue bore little political risk, because in the 1930s, most of the leaders of the Hungarian communist party, including those still in the top positions in the 1950s, were already in exile in Moscow, and thus could not be implicated. A summary report was drawn up, with five incriminating arguments and 12 exonerating arguments. The investigation related to Rajk's activities up to the end of the Second World War, with the aim of discovering signs of treachery. Included in the evidence cited was a witness statement by Mrs László Rajk recalling that László Rajk had made no mention of being a police informer during his trial by the Arrow Cross in March 1945.¹⁹ The summary report, noting that the confessions during the 1949 interrogations and trial had been made under duress, recommended a new trial and the release from prison of the surviving members of the Rajk group.

The political context was now broadly favourable, as the rehabilitation of communists sentenced in show trials was crucial to the 'New Course' implemented by Nagy during his first term as Prime Minister from July 1953 to April 1955.²⁰ On 18 September 1954, Czakó submitted to the Chairman of the Supreme Court a motion for the retrial of László Rajk and two others who had been executed as alleged co-conspirators, Tibor Szőnyi and András Szalai.²¹ In a further memorandum sent to

Nagy on 22 September 1954, Czákó proposed an appeal hearing for Rajk and his associates. The memorandum was also received by the party General Secretary, Rákosi.²²

For the party, of course, it was clear that 'Case No. 1' was the most sensitive of all the cases now under review relating to communists sentenced in show trials. There were three big risk factors: first, a fear of addressing the issue of responsibility and in particular of naming those ÁVH (secret police) officials who had been involved in extracting false confessions; second, the issue of how to handle the shadowy role of Soviet advisers; and third, the likely continued presence of Júlia Rajk at the appeal hearings. Indeed, the latter did not hesitate to tell informal contacts, acquaintances and colleagues about the rehabilitation process and the anomalies surrounding it. Moreover, she openly discussed developments with her friends – and this at a time when Khrushchev's 'secret speech' condemning Stalin was still well over a year away. All of these risks, and especially the last, threatened the authority of the party and ultimately came to undermine the entire Rákosi regime. This in turn highlights three unique features of the de-Stalinisation process in Hungary – the decision to start reviewing show trials involving communists and social democrats at an early stage after Stalin's death; the difficulties caused by the party's inability to keep the existence of such appeal hearings secret; and its failure to prevent released prisoners or relatives of executed party comrades from speaking out.

By November 1954, according to a report written by the Deputy Minister of the Interior and ÁVH Major-General István Dékán, 89 case reviews had been completed, including those of Júlia Rajk and the future party General Secretary Kádár, the latter having been released in July 1954 from a life sentence imposed after a show trial in December 1952.²³ A follow-up report, dated 28 December 1954, stated that 'we have established that the political crimes of László Rajk and his associates did not exist in reality'.²⁴ However, in the winter of 1954–1955, further progress was delayed by a power struggle in the highest echelons of the party leadership.²⁵ On 17 February 1955, Prime Minister Nagy sent a letter to the Politburo in which he expressed his profound dissatisfaction at the slowness of the case review process. Two factors were causing delays: first, the weakness of the three-member rehabilitation commission, appointed by the Politburo in May 1954 to establish a framework for dealing with cases where party comrades had been wrongly convicted. According to Nagy, this commission was 'incapable of accomplishing its task', treated the written evidence as its own property, and refused to share it with members of the Politburo. The other reason was

difficulties in 'holding to account those against whom grave evidence had arisen in the course of the investigations', namely police interrogators. Nagy proposed the disbandment of the commission and recommended that future decisions should be taken directly by the Politburo. He threatened to resign if his proposals were rejected, because he 'could not accept responsibility' for what was happening.²⁶ The letter suggests a certain amount of naivety on Nagy's part; he seems to have failed to recognise the three-member commission's true purpose (to preserve the authority of the party) and vainly hoped that the Politburo's involvement would guarantee the continuation of the rehabilitation process.

Such hopes were reinforced when, in a letter to the Central Committee on 9 February 1955, Minister of the Interior Piros listed the names of the ÁVH officers who had committed criminal acts. He proposed that the officers in question be investigated by a committee of state security officers and then be sentenced to expulsion from the party and/or imprisonment.²⁷ However, in April 1955, Nagy himself was dismissed as Prime Minister and deprived of his membership of the Politburo and Central Committee, rendering him no longer able to influence events from the inside. The three-member rehabilitation commission now comprised Rákosi, Lajos Ács and Antal Apró. The latter had been co-opted as a recent beneficiary of the rehabilitation process and was very willing to cooperate.²⁸

In a report on 6 April 1955, the Department of Investigations of the Ministry of the Interior warned of the greatest danger presented by the appeal hearings: 'When the convicted state security officers are being heard [as witnesses], in particular Gábor Péter [the former head of the ÁVH who was himself purged and imprisoned in 1952], attention must also be given to the fact that they will try to shift responsibility for the cases they fabricated onto some of the Party leaders and onto Soviet comrades, and it is inevitable that the names of some of the members of the party's Central Committee will feature in the proceedings.'²⁹ Mentioning such names was, of course, taboo. In June 1955, the Ministry of the Interior came up with a solution when it suggested that the 'top secret nature' of the Rajk case made it vital to ensure that the appeal hearing 'be divided into separate parts and [that] only the most necessary persons [are] examined as witnesses'.³⁰

In July 1955, the Politburo decided to accelerate the rehabilitation process, whereby, with the exception of the Rajk case, 'all other cases should be concluded' by mid-October.³¹ The appeal hearing for László Rajk and his associates was delayed until 23–25 November, when it was finally held at the Hungarian Supreme Court.³² Prior to the hearing,

however, Rákosi gave a report on 'new' developments in the 'Rajk case' at a Politburo meeting. He stated that Rajk had been responsible for Hungary's worsening relations with Yugoslavia, because 'he had kept the party in the dark about his first detention [in 1931] and the grave circumstances surrounding it'.³³ Shortly before this meeting, on 5 November 1955, the rehabilitation commission had come to a decision concerning the witnesses. As far as cases subject to review were concerned, the commission's report mainly cited the witness statements and accounts used at the original trials, and did not challenge their veracity. At the carefully staged appeal hearing for Rajk and associates, the witnesses were asked the very same questions, and in their responses they repeated their previous statements word for word, in the arcane language of party functionaries.³⁴ Moreover, the witnesses made no attempt to present László Rajk in a positive light. Indeed, when he was called to give evidence on 24 November 1955, István Tömpe stated the following: 'In my view, Rajk was a coward *in 1949 too*, and that is why he agreed to play along with the lie [my italics, A.P.]'.³⁵

The court acquitted László Rajk of the crime of espionage and conspiracy on grounds of absence of culpability, and it acquitted him of crimes against the people on grounds of lack of evidence. In November 1955, a Central Committee resolution placed the blame on former ÁVH head Péter and on Rajk himself, as the latter had concealed the 'grave circumstances' of his detention in 1931.³⁶ In reality, the light sentence received by László Rajk in the case brought against party activists arrested at Budapest University in 1931–1932, which was repeatedly mentioned as suspicious 23 years later, reflected his minor status in the trial and the fact that – not for the first time – the Horthy regime's police force was unaware of his real identity as a leading communist functionary. Furthermore, none of his co-defendants in 1932 had incriminated him. In short, even though László Rajk was found innocent of the criminal charges that he had faced in 1949, some of the witness statements at the appeal hearing, and the Central Committee's November 1955 resolution on the case, placed him under continued political and moral suspicion. The battle to restore his reputation was still not over.

The contradictions and complexities of rehabilitation

In accordance with the instructions of the party leadership, the rehabilitation of party members was supposed to be carried out in 'greatest secrecy'. Júlia Rajk fought against this tendency, whereby her first step

was to use the name Mrs László Rajk. For instance, although she was examined at the Supreme Court during the appeal hearing for László Rajk in November 1955 as 'Mrs László Györk', she nevertheless signed her statement as 'Mrs László Rajk'. On hearing the name Rajk, many party members felt a shiver go down their spines – either because they had allowed themselves to be persuaded of László Rajk's guilt or because they had testified against him in various public forums or even in a court of law.

After the appeal hearing for László Rajk and his associates in November 1955, the regime applied pressure on Júlia by way of the party secretary in the Eighth District of Budapest, where the Szabó Ervin Library – her place of employment since February 1955 – was situated. It assigned József Suhajda the task of persuading her of the 'incorrectness of her position' and that her attitude 'was causing many problems, as she merely criticised and refused to accept help'. Suhajda agreed to undertake the task – doing so, however, against his better judgement ('It would have been better to reject the task'). He told Júlia that 'although her conduct was fully understandable given what had happened to her murdered innocent husband, it was nevertheless very costly and was preventing closure'. In response, Júlia employed a tactic that had already proved successful: she openly stated her opinion and then told Suhajda what she had experienced. The loyal party functionary Suhajda was so shocked by Mrs Rajk's words that he could still remember them almost 30 years after their meeting: 'Do you not know that, despite all the promises [that his life would be spared if he confessed], my husband was taken to the gallows and that he was still saying "Long live the party! Long live the Soviet Union"?' Suhajda questioned how Rajk had allowed himself to get into such an awkward position. 'Why did they not get people to talk to her who had worked with her husband and who knew what had happened? I couldn't give answers to *a lady devoured by pain* [my italics, A.P.]' Júlia's words evidently came as a shock to this party functionary; he was confronted by a wife in mourning for her husband, who was merely asking for justice, and for her husband to receive the proper funeral he deserved.³⁷

The November 1955 resolution of the Central Committee on the Rajk case, blaming Péter and Rajk himself, was made known to Júlia, in accordance with the Central Committee's wishes, by way of the party branch organisation at the Szabó Ervin Library. Júlia apparently stood up and stated that she disagreed with the contents of the resolution. She asked for the matter to be investigated by the CPCC and the Central Committee.³⁸ Her words appear to have had an effect. In a letter dated

7 December 1955, 'Comrade Mrs László Rajk' was asked to attend an appointment in Akadémia Street at 10 a.m. on 8 December.³⁹

Not much remains by way of records of this meeting or of Júlia's subsequent correspondence with the party leadership. Her main achievement was to compel the party bosses to address her concerns; they could not simply pretend that she did not exist or that her name was Mrs László Györk. Whenever she felt she was being mistreated, she would immediately pick up a pen and write. Her most important demand was that her husband should receive a proper burial.⁴⁰

In April 1956, Apró, in his capacity as a member of the rehabilitation commission, prepared a report for the Politburo on the principles governing the rehabilitation of those senior party comrades who had been wrongly convicted and who were entitled to have their expulsion from the party reviewed in line with a Politburo resolution of 21 May 1954. According to the report, cases concerning 234 individuals had been investigated. Of this number, 132 individuals had been convicted and imprisoned, 102 had been acquitted, 43 had spent time in pre-trial detention, 18 had been interned, and 41 were relatives of those sentenced.⁴¹ By now the wildest rumours were circulating about Júlia Rajk – for instance, that she was to receive a villa in the Second District of Budapest, or a monthly pension of 5,000 forints, or a job as manager of the most beautiful patisserie in Budapest. It was even alleged that Tito had personally sent her money via the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest.⁴² However, the report simply stated that her party membership had been restored and that she had received compensation amounting to 92,193 forints, a two-roomed apartment with *middle-class comforts* [my italics, A.P.], child benefit of 700 forints, an annual four-week holiday, and an entitlement to special hospital treatment and to convalescence at a sanatorium. She had received more than any other rehabilitated individual, but not as much as the rumours claimed. The report also detailed the rehabilitation of other members of the Rajk family who had received party punishments in the aftermath of the 1949 trial.⁴³

The question of financial compensation to rehabilitated communists was initially handled by the Ministry of the Interior, but was later managed by a party commission headed by Apró. This was one area, indeed, where the party felt able to compromise. In total, rehabilitation resulted in the payment of a sum of 4.9 million forints to the victims, and this was coupled with the awarding of 150 apartments, 245 one-week holidays, and 63 hospital treatments. But there were also weaknesses in the process, including, as even Apró admitted, a failure to settle financial matters in a satisfactory manner. The court proceedings were 'slow and

gradual', and 'were not receiving adequate publicity, which resulted in further delays and the unsatisfactory treatment of rehabilitated persons by certain bodies and functionaries'. Furthermore, 'relatives of the executed individuals questioned why they were not permitted to exhume the bodies of family members'.⁴⁴

At a meeting on 19 April 1956, the Politburo approved a list of rehabilitated party members and then passed a resolution ordering that posthumous rehabilitation notices be read out at the former workplaces of the deceased by 31 May at the latest. It also stipulated that the Chief Public Prosecutor should issue certificates stating cause of death to the relatives.⁴⁵ A symbolic moral rehabilitation of those communists who had been executed as supposed traitors thus took place, but controversies surrounding their funerals and reburials still lay ahead.

Reburial

In her battle for the memory of her husband and for her own name, Júlia Rajk was forced to fight on several fronts. First, on account of her husband's term as Minister of the Interior, she had to deal with the hostility of those who were opposed to the party and its stranglehold over Hungarian political life. Also hostile to her were exiles in the west, who struggled to fathom the 'emotional myths' that arose around a man who had once been the iron-fist Minister of the Interior for a communist regime. Meanwhile, the old party leaders, people who at one time had been close comrades of her and her husband, publicly called Mrs Rajk a traitor to the workers' movement. In spite of these attacks (or perhaps because of them), Júlia Rajk did not give up. She was determined to have her husband properly buried and to win back her name.

The public debates held by the Petőfi Circle, a new forum for dissident opinion, helped to prepare the way intellectually for the revolution of October-November 1956.⁴⁶ The Circle's 'partisan debate', held on 18 June 1956, and attended by many former members of the underground communist movement, was Júlia's first public appearance as Mrs László Rajk since 1949. Her speech on that day was particularly significant because it established the linguistic framework for faithful communists to express their criticism of the past actions of the Rákosi regime. Unlike previous meetings held by the Petőfi Circle, at the 'partisan debate' communists who had been sentenced after show trials publicly proclaimed that despite their imprisonment, they still believed in communism and Leninist ideals. What they also wanted, however, were radical changes

in the policies and composition of the party leadership. Still, for members of the public attending the meeting, the most interesting aspect was to see 'how the communists bash each other in the debate'.⁴⁷ In the end, the meeting lasted until the early hours of the next morning. Its important message was that the communists were now agreed on the need to face up to the past – something they had previously denounced as a fetish of 'right-wing reactionaries'.

The words spoken by Júlia Rajk at the meeting were noted down; they deserve our special attention, as she rarely made public speeches. It is clear even from the edited, published version that it was not a prepared speech. Her words were spontaneous, and she spoke from the heart. When she appeared on the rostrum, she was applauded for around ten minutes. And at the end of her speech, 'the hall resounded with approval'.⁴⁸ She spoke in a clear and considered way, posing many rhetorical questions. The effectiveness of the speech was due to her credibility as one who had suffered at the hands of the Rákosi regime. She compared and contrasted the prisons of the Horthy regime with those of the communist authorities, concluding that prisoners had received better treatment in the former. Rather than make statements, she asked:

How is it possible that the reactionaries saw what the comrades failed to see? Where is the error in the system? What allowed [party officials] not only to make mistakes, but also to commit grave crimes? Where is this error, which still exists? I must say that the people who now want to rehabilitate [the victims] are the same ones who sentenced them, who murdered them, and who sent them to the gallows.

Júlia then analysed the anomalies of the rehabilitation process, in particular the Central Committee resolution of November 1955 concerning the Rajk case. With great conviction, she noted that László Rajk had been a good communist and a suitable role model for young communists.

I feel that the Rajk issue constitutes a part of the process by which they [the supporters of Rákosi] have destroyed this country economically, politically and morally.... Relying on the Hungarian people, we – all of us, the old underground communists and the new intellectuals – must now reinstate Leninist norms. They forced the old comrades out, and this all started with the trial of Rajk in 1949.⁴⁹

The message was clear: the old comrades had been purged by newcomers who had caused much damage to the party. The task was therefore to accomplish László Rajk's rehabilitation, because this would allow for a return to the old communist path which had broad national support. Moreover, the spirit of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union needed to be applied in Hungary, and this would necessarily result in leadership changes. The speech aroused people's emotions, but it also presented a clear political programme. The personal suffering of Júlia Rajk, the credibility of the 'language of grief', added weight to her words. She received a standing ovation from the 2,000 people in attendance.

Meanwhile, as she still did not know where her husband had been executed or what had happened to his remains, Júlia continued to bombard the authorities with letters. By the spring of 1956 the party leadership was under great pressure. In the wake of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in February, party veterans began making public demands for clear answers concerning the Rajk trial. At a meeting on 24 May 1956, the Politburo reached a decision on additional measures related to the process of rehabilitation. They approved a proposal calling for the creation of a three-member commission, consisting of a member of the Politburo, the Chairman of the Supreme Court, and the Chief Public Prosecutor. It was accepted that there could be no further delays; an authorisation for exhumation of those executed after the Rajk trial would have to be given.⁵⁰

The minutes of the Politburo's meetings show that the party leadership wanted complete control of the reburial event: it was to be attended only by invited comrades, and the party leaders considered it natural that Mrs Rajk would want to take part. On 27 September 1956, the authorities informed the widows of four high profile figures who had been executed in the Rajk case (Mrs Rajk, Szőnyi, Szalai and Pálffy) by telephone that their deceased husbands' bodies had been found and that a burial would take place at the Kerepesi cemetery on the morning of 1 October. They were told to present themselves in Gödöllő in order to identify the bodies.⁵¹

According to the medical expert, the identification of László Rajk was relatively simple, as the skeletal remains placed on the sheet revealed a man of tall stature with gunshot damage to the forearm, a wound Rajk had received in the Spanish Civil War. Júlia Rajk was visibly shocked by the sight of the 'moldy and ant-ridden collection of bones'. She became even more determined to fight for her husband's full rehabilitation. She also had exact ideas concerning the burial proceedings: 'Since they have already staged a show trial, they should now hold a show burial,' she said.⁵²

Júlia Rajk never faltered throughout the lengthy process of preparing for the funeral and the controversy over the various arrangements: when and where it should be held, whether to have a funeral bier, who should speak, whether the public should be allowed to attend. She told the authorities that if the public were denied access, she too would lay her flowers at the fence; and she asked for a postponement of the event until 6 October. Until the very last moment, the party leadership refused to countenance a public burial. At Júlia Rajk's behest, the party-opposition made multiple telephone calls in Budapest, telling people that the widows intended to stay away from the funeral unless the authorities relented on their conditions. In this way, within a day or so, the whole of Budapest could be mobilised and pressure placed on the party leadership. It was then that people understood the extent of the power that lay in their hands.

On 5 October 1956, 12 hours before the burial was due to begin, the party leadership finally recognised the embarrassment it would suffer if Mrs Rajk stuck to her word and refused to attend. At the last moment, therefore, they gave permission for the cemetery to be opened to the public. At the burial, both sides wished to avoid a disturbance. 'It is enough if they see just how many we are,' said Júlia's friends, who had fresh memories of Soviet tanks on the streets. Everyone was fully aware that the burial represented more than a tribute to the victims; by attending the funeral, people were clearly making a political statement. In the preceding 30 years, no one could remember so many flowers with the same words: 'We shall not forget.' Instead of a small crowd of 'mobilised' party members (which the Politburo had originally anticipated), in the end hundreds of thousands of people passed by the funeral bier and stood at the grave. And all of this was due, first and foremost, to Júlia Rajk's steadfastness.

The burial process itself was of course a historically familiar means of connecting private feelings of mourning with a public performance, while the universal 'language of grief' deployed by Júlia helped to overcome the opposition of the communist decision-makers. Following the iconography of the Pietà, women were mourning men (fathers, sons and partners). In the 1950s secular context, the widows and the orphans of purged party functionaries were also seen first of all as victims, even if the relatives they mourned had at one time been hardline ministers and officials of the communist regime. This opened the way for hundreds of thousands of people to demonstrate their solidarity with four grieving women, who had unjustly suffered the loss of loved ones, while expressing criticism of the communist system in a seemingly non-political way.

Meanwhile, the 1956 revolution, which began with student-led demonstrations in Budapest on 23 October, opened a new chapter in the process of de-Stalinisation in Hungary. The failure of the Hungarian authorities' cautious approach to rehabilitation in 1953–1955, which had been limited to the elite and barely impacted on ordinary citizens, led inexorably to the 1956 revolution, whereby the reburial of László Rajk and his associates served as a timely rehearsal. On 4 November 1956, when the Soviet army occupied Hungary, Júlia Rajk asked for political refugee status at the Yugoslav embassy. Like Nagy and members of his cabinet, she was subsequently kidnapped by Soviet forces and taken to Romania. She spent two years there, but was then given permission to return to Hungary as Júlia Rajk. After 1958, she was known simply as 'Júlia', becoming a real 'institution' in Hungarian society. Over the years, she became known as someone who always protected the weak against the abuses of the powerful. She also negotiated with the party leadership on behalf of anti-communist intellectuals. She helped establish a dog shelter, the first NGO in Hungary since the imposition of a ban on independent associations in 1951. In a case of transnational activism, she collected signatures in support of the human rights group Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. At a time when few people made charity donations, Júlia used the compensation she received for the loss of her husband to support a fund for talented university students. When the first proto-feminist movement was organised to protest against a proposed tightening of abortion laws in 1975, she was the first person to sign the petition. Her name at the top of the list served to reassure other participants in the first dissident action in Hungary since 1956. Júlia died in 1981.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the first wave of the rehabilitation process in Hungary, which coincided with Stalin's death and Nagy's 'New Course'. In 1956, in the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, an investigation was launched into the conduct of members of the state security forces, but its scope was very limited. At a meeting in July 1956, the Central Committee decided to conclude the process of rehabilitation, which had been underway for almost three years and had seriously damaged the party's prestige and authority. It was at this juncture that heads rolled: the party General Secretary, Mátyás Rákosi, was dismissed on 18 July, while Mihály Farkas, the former Minister of Defence, was expelled from the party. In this way,

the party hoped to achieve closure. Nonetheless, real and unqualified closure was never on the cards, either before or after the 1956 revolution. As Júlia Rajk remarked in an interview in 1980:

One cannot say of murder that it is [due to] the cult of personality. And this was murder. It was an intentional murder ... if a nation fails to confront its past, then its future will also be full of lies. And it is full of lies. In a word, the entire social structure needs to be democratised.... My husband was not rehabilitated. They simply named a street after him. That's not rehabilitation.⁵³

On 27 November 1956, after the crushing of the revolution and the assumption of power by Kádár, the Chief Public Prosecutor decreed the collective dismissal of former members of the ÁVH and ordered a review of their previous conduct. The true aim of this measure was to legitimise the establishment of a new state security force rather than to call to account, morally and politically, personnel from the former organisation. We know from research undertaken by Magdolna Baráth that under the terms of the Chief Public Prosecutor's decree, the conduct of 4,986 former ÁVH personnel was reviewed, of whom 3,048 had been active in the operative forces and 1,923 had been working in other areas (office work, dispatch and so on). In total, 4,971 persons whose conduct had been subject to review were exonerated. They received official certificates declaring that they had not been involved in unlawful acts committed by the state security forces. This meant they were employable by any state or communal organ or by a commercial enterprise. Only 15 former members of the state security forces (11 in Budapest and four in other areas of the country) were denied such certificates.⁵⁴ Of course, it was unrealistic to expect much from this process, since Kádár, as Minister of the Interior between 1948 and 1950, had himself played an active part in Rajk's demise, just as he had abandoned Nagy in 1956 and allowed him to be executed in 1958.

All of this rendered Júlia Rajk a crucial figure. Utilising the 'language of grief', she fought on the front line for justice – for the communists and social democrats who had been imprisoned or executed under the Rákosi regime, and for their wives and widows who would otherwise have had no one to speak for them in the male-dominated world of Hungarian politics pre- and post-1956. A further round of rehabilitation – undertaken once again rather half-heartedly and limited in scope – began after a Central Committee resolution in 1962. By 17 October 1962, the authorities had received 352 petitions, relating in

the most part to rehabilitation of purged party members after internment or resettlement (expulsion). In connection with the unlawful trial and conviction of members of the workers' movement, 122 individuals requested financial compensation or other forms of material assistance.⁵⁵ In reality, however, there were hundreds of thousands of victims of Hungary's Stalinist communist regime, and until the late 1980s their chances of rehabilitation were rendered slimmer against an official view of history that still legitimised the communists' coming to power in the late 1940s and depicted 1956 as an attempted 'counter-revolution'.

From Rákosi to Kádár and beyond, selectivity, secrecy and non-transparency of the various waves of rehabilitation since 1953 contributed to a 'war on memory', which only somebody of Júlia Rajk's determination and courage could oppose. In spite of some remarkable moments of reconciliation in Hungarian history since her death, such as the public reburial of Nagy in June 1989, three months before the country's final transition to multi-party democracy, the 'war on memory' continues to this day to characterise the country's politics and even its parliamentary debates, as far as the working through of the communist past is concerned.

Notes

1. Gallicus in Radio Free Europe, 22 June 1956, Reflector, No.C-339. Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (National Szechenyi Library) Radio Free Europe Collection 451/1083. p. 2.
2. M. Baráth, 'Az MDP vezetése és a rehabilitáció (1953–1956)', *Múltunk*, no. 4. (1999), pp. 40–97.
3. For more on Júlia Rajk, see A. Pető, *Rajk Júlia* (Budapest, 2001).
4. For a broader overview, see L. Borhi, 'Stalinist Terror in Hungary, 1945–1956', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 119–40.
5. Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára (Historical Archives of the State Security Services, henceforth ÁBTL) I. 1.b. (1500–208/60.a.) p. 5.
6. ÁBTL I. 13. -b. (V-142753), p. 8.
7. See e.g. ÁBTL I. 13. (V-142753), p. 29 (Testimony of Károlyné Döbrentei, 6 July 1955).
8. ÁBTL I. 13. (V-142753), p. 1.
9. ÁBTL I.1.e. V-142/673/5, pp. 296–8.
10. Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archive – henceforth MOL) 276. f. 65., p. 6.
11. ÁBTL I. 13. (V-142753), p. 39.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
13. ÁBTL I. 13. -b. (V-142753), p. 27.
14. MOL 276. f. 65. cs. 52. öe., p. 219.
15. ÁBTL I. 13. (V-142753), p. 33.

16. Ibid., p. 29.
17. For the full text of the 1969 essay, which appeared in the magazine *Kortárs* in the form of a 'Letter to Aladár Mód', see Pető, *Rajk Júlia*, pp. 251–6.
18. ÁBTL I. 1.e. (V-142/673/5), pp. 239–46.
19. Ibid., Report on the spying of László Rajk, 26 August 1954, p. 247.
20. Baráth, 'Az MDP vezetése és a rehabilitáció'.
21. ÁBTL I.1.h. (V-143/415), p. 21.
22. ÁBTL I.1.e. (V-142/673/5), p. 286.
23. ÁBTL I. 1.b. p. 63, report dated 12 November 1954. On Kádár, see Borhi, 'Stalinist Terror in Hungary', p. 133.
24. ÁBTL I. 1.b. (101–5446/1/54.), p. 59.
25. On this internal fight, see Baráth, 'Az MDP vezetése és a rehabilitáció', pp. 67–74.
26. MOL 276. f. 53. cs. 227. öe., p. 111.
27. Ibid., p. 112.
28. MOL 276.f. 62/28.öe., p. 18. Letter of 17 March 1955 to László Piros.
29. ÁBTL I. 1.b., p. 72.
30. Ibid., p. 66. Report of 11 June 1955.
31. MOL 276. f. 53. cs. 250. öe., p. 156. Report by Apró Antal on 3 October 1955.
32. ÁBTL I.1.h. V-143/415.
33. Quoted in Baráth, 'Az MDP vezetése és a rehabilitáció', p. 76.
34. ÁBTL I. 1.b., pp. 127–34.
35. ÁBTL I. 1. h. (V-143/415), p. 179.
36. Ibid.
37. All of the above quotes are taken from Suhajda's account of this meeting. See his autobiography, dated 2 September 1983, in Politikatörténeti Intézet Archivuma (Archive of the Institute of Political History) 867. f. 2/s-304., p. 46.
38. MOL 276. f. 65. cs. 52. öe. p. 267. Letter of 6 December 1955.
39. MOL 276. f. 65. cs. 52. öe., p. 262.
40. MOL 276. f. 65. cs. 52. öe., p. 270. Letter of February 1956.
41. MOL 276. f. 53. cs. 272., p. 17.
42. Open Society Archives, Budapest Rajk Lászlóné file, 205/12/0/101/18.
43. Gyula Rajk received 25,000 forints in cash, an apartment, and a monthly pension of 1,300 forints; Györk Lajosné was returned her holiday home; Jenőné Rajk was given a job; and Zoltán Rajk had his party membership restored and was admitted to the university with a scholarship. See MOL 276. f. 53. cs. 287. p. 72. Details of Júlia Rajk's financial compensation can be found at ÁBTL IX/6-1, p. 81. and IX/6.2., p. 10.
44. MOL 276. f. 53. cs. 272. öe., p. 17.
45. Ibid., p. 18.
46. On the Petőfi circle, see A. B. Hegedűs, 'The Petőfi Circle: The Forum of Reform in 1956', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1997), pp. 108–33.
47. ÁBTL V-150001/5, p. 15. Testimony of István Márkus.
48. A. B. Hegedűs (ed.), *A Petőfi Kör vitái hiteles jegyzőkönyvek alapján* (Minutes of the Petőfi Circle), Vol. 4: Partizántalákozó-Sajtóvita (Budapest, 1991), p. 203.
49. For the text of the speech, see Pető, *Rajk Júlia*, pp. 246–50.
50. MOL 276. f. 53. cs. 288. öe. 3,

51. For further details, see M. Potoky Strasser, *Il mito che e' caduto: Ungheria 1945–1956* (Rome, 1991), pp. 113–20.
52. Discussions with Mrs Rajk, 10 December 1956, in Documents from Romania, 1956 Institute, p. 5.
53. Interview with Júlia Rajk by Bokor Péter, 1980, in Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár (National Széchenyi Library), Collection of Historical Interviews, 142. B., p. 53.
54. M. Baráth, 'Felemás desztalinizáció. A törvénysértések lezárása és az állam-biztonsági szervek átszervezése Magyarországon 1962-ben', *Betekintő*, no. 3 (2012), pp. 8–9.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

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The Release and Rehabilitation of Victims of Stalinist Terror in Poland

Piotr Kłodoczny

Stalinism made its mark on Poland twice. The first phase began on 17 September 1939 when the Red Army marched into the eastern part of the country as part of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, and ended in 1941 with the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. The second period lasted from January 1944, when the Eastern Front in the Second World War again reached pre-war Polish territory, until the ‘Thaw’ following the death of Stalin in 1953. In 1945, the borders of Poland shifted dramatically towards the west (to the Oder and Neisse rivers) as a consequence of agreements reached at Yalta between the victorious powers. At the same time, Poland lost its pre-war territories east of the river Bug, which were incorporated into the Soviet Union. These territorial changes were accompanied by the forced resettlement of people of German origin from the western territories annexed to Poland, and the settlement there of Poles from the eastern regions. The introduction of the Stalinist system in Poland was clearly a tragedy for the entire nation and for every section of society. Nevertheless, there were certain groups of people who suffered a disproportionately harsh fate. For political and geopolitical reasons, these people were not commemorated in any way or rehabilitated until after 1989. Among them were Ukrainians resettled from their ancestral territories in Poland and removed to the Soviet Union as part of the Vistula Action of 1947, or Polish soldier-miners from Silesia (formerly part of Germany) who were likewise deported and forced into slave labour. However, other victims of the Stalinist period experienced at least a partial rehabilitation under the communist system itself, as a result of the changes that followed the death of Stalin.

The first group of people to benefit from de-Stalinisation were the so-called ‘repatriates’. When the Soviet Union annexed the eastern territories of pre-war Poland in 1939, they deemed the people living there

to be Soviet citizens. Before 1945, some were able to move westwards, to what was to become the new, communist Poland following the defeat of Nazi Germany. However, a considerable number were forced to remain in what was now deemed to be Soviet territory. They were joined by victims of the mass deportations carried out by Soviet agencies in eastern Poland in 1939–1941 and again after 1944.¹ The survivors among the deportees, and particularly those transported to the remoter regions of the USSR, were anxious to take up the opportunities presented by de-Stalinisation.

The second group who held out hopes for justice and a dramatic improvement in their fate following the death of Stalin were the victims of the terror meted out by the post-war communist authorities in Poland itself.² Political prisoners and the families of those killed by the regime as real or supposed ‘enemies of socialism’ now hoped that they would be able to apply for rehabilitation, restitution of confiscated property and/or compensation. In this chapter, we shall consider both of these groups in turn.

Political background

The political situation in Poland, and the possibility of releasing and rehabilitating the Polish victims of Stalinist terror, was obviously highly dependent on events taking place in the Soviet Union, including uncertainties as to who actually ruled in the Kremlin in the first few months after Stalin’s death. It should be emphasised, however, that in Poland the death of Stalin did not bring immediate effects in the form of a relaxation of domestic terror. On the contrary, repressions were at a peak in 1953. In September of that year, for example, the Bishop of Kielce, Czesław Kaczmarek, who had been held as a suspect since January 1951, was sentenced to 12 years in jail as a supposed ‘Gestapo collaborator’ and ‘Vatican spy’. In the same month, the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, was also arrested and detained for three years after repeatedly rejecting calls to denounce Kaczmarek.³

In fact, the first signs of the ‘Thaw’ did not appear until the second half of 1954. An event of national significance, contributing to and precipitating de-Stalinisation, was undoubtedly the decision made by Radio Free Europe in September 1954 to launch a series of broadcasts by a high-profile defector, Lt.-Col. Józef Światło (until 5 December 1953, the Deputy Director of the 10th Department of the Ministry of Public Security or MBP), outlining the clandestine methods used by the state security apparatus. Światło’s broadcasts gave a detailed insight

into the links between the Polish party and security organs and their Soviet masters, and also the crimes committed by these organs during political trials and processes. These revelations caused serious turmoil within the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and across Polish society as a whole. At the turn of November and December 1954, a consultation of the 'Central Party *aktyw*' took place, during which, for the first time, the leadership of the PZPR was subjected to severe criticism, in particular over its failure to control the security apparatus. Further criticism of the Politburo, along with demands for a change in party policy, occurred in January 1955 at the third plenum of the PZPR. In an attempt to limit the damage, and give the impression that any 'excesses' were down to rogue elements rather than the communist system itself, the party sought to take charge of the situation. In December 1954, the MBP was dissolved and replaced by a Committee of Public Safety with reduced staffing levels and limitations on its field of activities. Józef Różański, Director of the Investigative Department of the MBP, was arrested, and the vice-ministers of the MBP were removed from the Central Committee. Repressive measures and surveillance activities were curtailed. Cells of the Security Department used to control employees in most workplaces were liquidated. Władysław Gomułka, the former party First Secretary who was removed from power in September 1948 as a 'nationalist deviationist' and finally arrested in July 1951, although never put on trial, was freed from jail at the end of 1954.⁴

The situation began to slip out of the party's control in the first months of 1956, when Khrushchev's 'secret speech' was distributed in Poland. This was followed by a major insurrection of workers in Poznań in June 1956. Both events contributed to the de-stabilisation of the existing political system and proved a heavy blow to the ruling PZPR's authority.⁵ The public discussion of the crimes and cardinal errors of past policy not only cast a dark shadow over the Stalinist period, but also undermined the legitimacy of the communist system more generally.⁶ Another very important circumstance that catalysed the developments in Poland was the death of the First Secretary of the PZPR, Bolesław Bierut, in Moscow on 12 March 1956. The passing of Poland's leading Stalinist, chosen to replace Gomułka in 1948 and responsible for the persecution of the population and the repression of all signs of nationalism and anti-party sentiment in the period to 1954, considerably eased the process of de-Stalinisation. On 20 March 1956, Edward Ochab was appointed First Secretary of the PZPR, and on 6 April he announced in a speech at a meeting of the 'Warsaw and Warsaw Region Party *aktyw*' that the arrest of Gomułka in 1951 had

been unfair and unjustified. In line with this, the Prosecutor General, the Chief Prosecutor of the Polish army and the Minister of Justice were dismissed.⁷ On 27 April 1956, the Polish parliament, the Sejm, decreed the first major amnesty in four years, resulting in the release of large numbers of political prisoners and criminals in the following months.⁸ However, no rehabilitation law was agreed to go alongside this new amnesty law, and instead rehabilitation proceeded in a haphazard and random way, in accordance with the interests of politics rather than justice for the victims. The same applied to the repatriation and reintegration of Polish victims of Stalinist terror in the Soviet Union itself.

Repatriation

Several million people who had Polish citizenship in 1939 found themselves living under Soviet rule at the end of the Second World War, including residents of eastern territories annexed for a second time by Stalin in 1944–1945, and hundreds of thousands deported as suspected ‘criminals’ and ‘enemies of the people’ to the remoter regions of the USSR. Under an agreement reached on 26 July 1945, former Polish citizens of Polish and Jewish ancestry were offered a choice: accept Soviet citizenship or apply for repatriation to Poland. In the early post-war years, around 1.5 million people took the latter option, but from the end of 1948 to 1953, the numbers successfully applying for resettlement were reduced to a handful of orphaned or unaccompanied children each year.⁹ Estimates of the numbers of Polish citizens who remained in the USSR after 1948 vary between 1 million and 1.6 million.¹⁰ They fell into three categories: those who for personal or family reasons had not taken advantage of the right to leave; those who could not prove that they held Polish citizenship on 17 September 1939 and who therefore did not have the right to resettlement; and those who had been deported to the remoter regions of the Soviet Union.¹¹

After the death of Stalin and the fall of Lavrentii Beria, the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) announced a series of amnesties. Poles were among those who benefited. The first group of amnestied prisoners, numbering 354, was transferred to Poland on 9 January 1954.¹² Most of the returnees were aged over 30, and there were about 40 women among them. As many of them had been sentenced in the Soviet Union for political offences, the Polish authorities regarded them as a security threat and initially placed them in camps. Even after the prisoners were released, they were placed under constant surveillance, a practice that continued until June 1956.¹³ This first transport was

followed by others, so that at least 456 amnestied Poles were allowed to return in 1954 and 1955.¹⁴ Efforts were also made to repatriate former deportees of Polish and Jewish nationality who had been released from the Gulag prior to the amnesty. This resulted in nine transports destined for Poland by the end of 1955.¹⁵ Altogether, between January 1954 and January 1956, around 6,000 people were repatriated to Poland.¹⁶

Allowing amnestied people the option of returning to Poland encouraged others to apply for resettlement in the Fatherland. The Polish embassy in Moscow received a huge number of requests for help, especially after news broke of the repatriation agreements reached between the USSR and West Germany during Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's state visit to the Soviet Union in September 1955.¹⁷ If the last German POWs from the Second World War were now allowed to go home, then it followed that Poles – officially acknowledged as victims of Nazi, if not Soviet, aggression – should receive similar treatment. In February 1956, the Soviet Ministry of the Interior announced a relaxation of the rules governing migration across the border with Poland; and in March 1957, a formal repatriation agreement was reached with Poland. Altogether, 30,800 returnees made the journey to Poland in 1956,¹⁸ and, in spite of restrictions placed on further applications at the end of 1957, and ongoing bureaucratic and political obstacles, it is estimated that as many as 250,000 former Polish citizens had returned by the close of 1959. The geography of the repatriating regions in the USSR also changed. The returnees of 1955 consisted almost entirely of Poles being held in the remoter regions of the USSR: Siberia, Kazakhstan and the Far East. Over the course of 1956, however, as many as 28,000 people from the three Soviet Republics neighbouring Poland were repatriated: Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.¹⁹ Taking the overall figure of 250,000 returnees between 1955 and 1959, in excess of 100,000 came from Belarus, 76,000 or more from Ukraine, over 46,500 from Lithuania and almost 20,500 – or just over 8 per cent – from Russia.²⁰

These figures indicate that – in contrast to the period 1954–1955 – between 1956 and 1959, only a small proportion of the Polish returnees were former Gulag prisoners or victims of Stalinist terror in a narrow sense. The majority represented Poles who had been left in the westernmost provinces of the Soviet Union after the border changes and forced resettlements of 1944–1947. Many of the latter were seeking reunion with families in Poland as much as, if not more than, desiring an escape from the USSR and the burdens of Soviet citizenship.²¹ However, those serving prison sentences in the Soviet Union formed another category among the repatriates. In theory, they were entitled to take advantage of

the right to repatriation, even if they had not been released from prison (Article 3 of the repatriation agreement). The Polish embassy in Moscow gathered the details of approximately 10,000 people in this category. On the basis of requests that came in, the official in charge of repatriation affairs put together a list of 2,800 names in the spring of 1957. Not all the details were complete or verifiable, and so he decided to present the Soviet authorities with a list of around 2,000 Polish citizens asking to be transported to their country, where – if need be – they would complete the remainder of their sentence. Financial aid was also sent to several hundred prisoners. The Soviet military police checked the list, found about 1,400 of these people on their files, and decided to release them. However, the process of carrying out searches in prisons and camps was so protracted that by July 1957, only 198 people had been handed over to the Polish authorities. Meanwhile, the lists of prisoners being sought grew continually. In the autumn of 1957, an initial group of 1,821 former prisoners was released to Poland, followed by further groups. In the second half of 1958, the Soviet authorities transported 862 serving prisoners to the border post at Brest (Brześć nad Bugiem), 715 of whom were allowed to cross into Poland. Seventy people waived their right to repatriation, and the release of the remainder was called into question at the last moment. In total, 3,015 Polish prisoners with the right to repatriation were released by the Soviet authorities after 1956.²²

Returnees from the USSR in the 1950s did not concentrate in particular communities, as had often been the case with those ‘resettled’ from the eastern territories in the second half of the 1940s. Instead, they usually ended up dispersed across those parts of western and northern Poland currently experiencing population shortages (the provinces of Wrocław, Olsztyn, Zielona Góra, Szczecin and Koszalin).²³ Group settlement was possible on collective farms or state forests, but in fact, returnees showed a firm preference for urban settlement, despite the terrible accommodation shortages in post-war Poland.²⁴ Rural settlement was less attractive, above all because it was so difficult to set up private farms. Families not only had to acquire basic domestic items, but also tools, inventory stock, seed and so on. Special loans were intended for these ends, but they could not cover the costs of everything that was needed.²⁵ It should therefore come as no surprise that most repatriates went into industry (44.6 per cent), transport and communications (15.6 per cent) and construction work (11.2 per cent).²⁶ The available sources (both official and from memoirs) show that despite all the difficulties, both the conditions of settlement and the state provision were a good deal better than they had been for returnees in the second half

of the 1940s, particularly as Polish society at large also participated in the project of supporting repatriates. The All Polish Committee to Aid Repatriates was formed, among other groups. The Polish Red Cross and the Catholic Church also provided assistance. Finally, money and material gifts were sent by exiled and expatriate circles in the west. All of these factors aided the integration of the returnees, but hardly transformed them into firm supporters of the post-Stalinist communist regime in Poland. Indeed, during the period when Ochab and then Gomułka were in power (1956–1970), support for returnees was a veiled way of expressing opposition to the authorities.²⁷

Rehabilitation and amnesties in Poland

The years 1944–1956 were the most violent and repressive in post-war Polish history. It is estimated that during this time, 25,000 Poles were murdered by the communist authorities, 50,000 transported to the USSR, 240,000 arrested and 25,000 allowed to die in prisons.²⁸ The victims were in the first place those considered to be political enemies of the new regime. Hundreds of thousands of farmers were also imprisoned by way of punishment for failing to keep up with compulsory deliveries of grain, cattle for slaughter and milk.²⁹ Among the statistics cited above, the figure of 25,000 deaths in prison provides a particularly stark reminder of how far respect for the law and basic principles of justice had broken down during the Stalinist era. Most of the prison fatalities relate to the use of extreme forms of torture during interrogation in order to extract false confessions of guilt, and the proliferation of harsh punishments, including use of the death penalty.

With the onset of the 'Thaw' after Stalin's death, growing pressure from public opinion and criticism from within the party itself, the communist authorities were obliged to tackle continuing injustices in the penal system and deal with the problem of historic crimes committed by members of the security services. The question of rehabilitation for victims of the past terror also arose. It should be pointed out, however, that only those who had been wrongly convicted and sentenced by Polish courts stood a realistic chance of rehabilitation. Those who had been killed in actions by the Polish military police and army, executed without trial, or sentenced by Soviet courts or military tribunals were not even taken into consideration in the rehabilitation process.

In a legal sense, rehabilitation refers to the reversal of a guilty verdict and the acquittal of the accused. As early as 1955, the party leadership had begun to doubt the reliability of sentences in certain cases where

the preparatory proceedings had been carried out by the public security administration. The results of investigations confirmed existing doubts and led to the discovery of shocking abuses of power on the part of the security organs. Some cases were even subject to investigations as early as 1954. This was also when the Commission for the Affairs of Rehabilitated Persons was set up by the Central Committee of the PZPR.³⁰

In January 1955, the third plenum of the PZPR was held, at which it was admitted in public for the first time that 'serious violations of the rule of law by certain branches of the security services' had taken place.³¹ It was also decided that citizens who had fallen victim to these violations should be released from prison and should receive full compensation for the injustice inflicted on them.³² The Public Prosecutor's Office and the courts were called upon to undertake the rehabilitation of people sentenced unjustly and to make reparations for the injuries committed in the past. Although the Politburo accepted the need to review past cases in principle, and even brought into being a special commission of the Politburo on 3 November 1955 tasked with the consideration of appeals for rehabilitation, these actions were undertaken merely for the sake of appearances; they had little meaning in practice.³³

Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 placed further pressure on the Polish communist regime. From the point of view of those in power, it now seemed best to carry out the rehabilitation process as quickly as possible, and preferably through closed trials and appeal hearings, so as to ensure that as little information as possible about abuses during the Stalinist period leaked out to the general public. An even better solution would be to announce a new amnesty, allowing the regime to sidestep the issue of rehabilitation altogether. As a method of reducing prisoner numbers, amnesties had already been used on three occasions during the Stalinist era itself: in 1945, 1947 and 1952. The fourth amnesty, announced on 27 April 1956,³⁴ was targeted at political prisoners as well as 'ordinary' criminals, and came in response to new social and political pressures rather than a mere desire on the part of the authorities to lower the prison population. Sentences of up to five years were suspended in full, those of up to ten years were reduced by half and those of ten years or more were lowered by one third. The official report on the amnesty stated that of almost 70,000 prisoners in Poland, half had been released by 20 May. Almost 6,000 people classed as 'political criminals' benefited from the amnesty, as did over 1,000 accused of collaboration with the (German) occupying forces during the war or of being responsible for 'the fascisation of the country in the pre-war period'.³⁵

It must be emphasised, however, that amnesty was not an acquittal or acknowledgement of innocence, but rather a remission of punishment that indirectly confirmed the guilt of the accused person. This was stated explicitly in the preamble to the amnesty agreement:

Taking into account the great achievements of the Polish nation in the construction of the socialist system and the concomitant strengthening of the People's Republic of Poland, in order to enable people who have committed crimes to return swiftly to normal life, in order to facilitate the reintegration of those Polish citizens and former Polish citizens who have committed crimes, and to ensure their participation in the creative work of the Polish nation, and given the considerable passage of time that has elapsed since some of these crimes were committed, dating from before the foundation of the People's Republic of Poland, it has been decided as follows...³⁶

Yet for many political prisoners, an amnesty was not enough, particularly when it placed them in the same category as criminals who were released from jail at the same time and on the same grounds. As a tool for satisfying the changing priorities of the regime and the day-to-day needs of the prison and criminal justice system, amnesties worked in Stalinist times. However, they did not meet with social expectations during the crisis year for communist rule in Poland, in 1956. The regime was soon forced to recognise that the situation could not be contained through an amnesty alone. In June 1956, the rehabilitation commission was charged with dealing with the appeals for rehabilitation that flowed into the Ministry of Justice. A special unit for investigating sentences in the case of crimes against the state was set up in the Public Prosecutor's Office.³⁷ According to information provided by the chief of the rehabilitation commission, on 1 November 1956 the number of requests for rehabilitation stood at 152, while by 27 December 1956 this had risen to 1,293, of which only 86 had been processed.³⁸

In the absence of a general rehabilitation act, court verdicts and sentences issued during the Stalinist period could only be overturned though individual appeal hearings, or by having particular cases reopened. After the quashing of a sentence, further legal proceedings were for the most part discontinued either on the basis of the amnesty of 27 April 1956, or because of lack of evidence that a crime had been committed. Like the granting of an amnesty, neither of these scenarios represented an explicit acknowledgement or confirmation of innocence. Nor were they automatically a basis for someone achieving

material compensation or moral recognition as having been previously wronged by the party or the state. In this sense, the case of Kazimierz Moczarski proved to be a psychological breakthrough for victims. After leaving prison, he refused to accept the amnesty and instead successfully demanded a public retrial which ended in his acquittal and legal rehabilitation. From this point on, the number of applications for rehabilitation rose sharply, even though many victims of Stalinist era repression were understandably only interested in being released from prison and did not have the strength (or, frequently, the will) to carry on the fight to clear their names in face of the procrastinating tactics of the state authorities.³⁹ The reluctance to go through the ordeal of a retrial was reinforced by the fact that these trials were often conducted by the same judges who been responsible for passing severe sentences in the Stalinist period, including the death penalty. Moreover, there was no certainly that a retrial would end in acquittal.

Some victims nonetheless did succeed in gaining rehabilitation through having their cases reopened. Verdicts and sentences could be annulled in those cases where it came to light that the court had acted on the basis of false confessions, bogus evidence or bribery. The quashing of a verdict could also take place if, after sentencing, new facts or evidence had come to light indicating the innocence of the accused. Circumstances impeding this particular pathway to rehabilitation often included the inaccessibility of records of case proceedings, as well as dependence on the decision of courts or judges who were not always willing to take the politically risky step of challenging past rulings.

The second legal means of overturning an unjust verdict or sentence was to appeal. The main barrier to this course of action was that the only people legally empowered to apply for an appeal were the Minister of Justice, the Procurator General and the First Chairman of the High Court. In cases that fell under the jurisdiction of the military courts, the Chairman of the Military High Court or the Chief Military Procurator could initiate an appeal. All of these people were state (or party) functionaries, for whom the wellbeing of the authorities and the system were the most important consideration, over and above justice for those who had been falsely accused or imprisoned.

An example of the difficulties in pursuing justice is the attempt to secure the posthumous rehabilitation of Captain Witold Pilecki, deemed by the British historian M. R. D. Foot to be one of the six bravest people involved in anti-Nazi resistance during the Second World War.⁴⁰ In 1941, as a member of the Polish Home Army, he had

managed to infiltrate the Auschwitz death camp and smuggle out information about what was happening there to the British authorities and the Polish government-in-exile in London. Later, he played a part in the August 1944 Warsaw Uprising. After the war, he was arrested and accused by the communists of maintaining illegal contacts with foreign imperialist powers. After a secret trial he received the death sentence, which was carried out in 1948. In the 'Thaw' following Stalin's death, a representative of the Captain's daughter applied to the First Chairman of the High Court, requesting an appeal hearing. In a letter dated 3 September 1957, the Chairman wrote that he could find no basis for such a hearing. As late as 1989, an attempt by the Head Office of the Society for the Protection of Auschwitz to have the case reopened yielded no results. The Minister of Justice sent the Head Office's application to the Chief Military Court, but they did not take it up, because, as the Chief Military Procurator wrote on 12 July 1989, no basis could be found for Pilecki's full rehabilitation. The Procurator's position was that the sentence passed in 1948 had been both lawful and materially just.⁴¹ Over a year later, Pilecki was fully rehabilitated. However, this came only as a consequence of the end of communist rule. The point to note is that even in July 1989, in the aftermath of the partially democratic elections won by the opposition Solidarity movement, there was a lack of political will on the part of the communist state to undertake any action aimed at the lifting of an unjust criminal verdict and sentence from 1948. It therefore comes as no surprise that in 1956, there was even less chance of justice being achieved.

In any case, even the initiation of rehabilitation procedures offered no guarantee of legal and moral closure. This was the case with another Second World War hero, Brigadier General August Emil Fieldorf, the former Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army. Although Fieldorf was unjustly sentenced to death and executed in 1952 for supposed collaboration with the Germans during the war, the verdict and sentence were overturned in 1957 by the High Court, and the case was sent for reconsideration to the Regional Court for the Warsaw area. The court, in turn, sent the case files to the Procurator General so that he might complete the investigation. On 4 July 1958, the Public Prosecutor's Office decided to discontinue the case on grounds of lack of evidence of the accused's guilt. This decision allowed rumours to circulate that Fieldorf had indeed committed an offence, but that it had been impossible to prove it. Even the fact that in 1960 his widow received compensation from the State Treasury for the unjust execution of her husband could not alter this situation.⁴² Finally, in 1989, the Procurator General

rehabilitated Fieldorf by issuing a statement that he had not committed any of the offences of which he had been found guilty.⁴³

The refusal to introduce a general rehabilitation act in the communist period also makes it impossible, even today, to draw up an exact list of former political detainees who were rehabilitated before 1989. Each case was dealt with individually, and without reference to the wider context of an endemic and systemic violation of justice in the years 1944–1956. Those accused of crimes of a non-political nature also had the option of trying to have their cases reopened or seeking to launch appeals. Thus an exact calculation of the number of political victims of the Stalinist system who were rehabilitated would entail an analysis of the case files in each particular instance. Unfortunately, at the present time, the necessary research has not been carried out on a nationwide scale. What can be noted, however, is the sudden rush of applications for rehabilitation in 1956–1957, followed by a gradual tailing off thereafter.

Finally, the party was also obliged to make provisions for reviewing the case files of those high-profile communists who had been purged during the Stalinist period and now requested political rehabilitation. The most obvious beneficiaries of this process were the members of the so-called 'Gomułka group' who had been ousted from power and expelled from the party in September 1948. In 1950, two generals close to Gomułka, Marian Spychalski and Grzegorz Korczyński, were arrested, and on 12 August 1951 Gomułka (and his wife) met the same fate. In spite of many interrogations, the Gomułkas were never charged with any offence. At Christmas 1954 they were released from a hospital belonging to the Ministry of Public Security,⁴⁴ and from February 1955 they were allowed to spend several months in a sanatorium.⁴⁵

In the case of Gomułka and his associates, 'rehabilitation' meant restoration of party membership. The 20th Congress of the CPSU with Khrushchev's 'secret speech' and the violent workers' demonstrations in Poznań in June 1956 made clear that the party needed a new leader. As a result, Gomułka's popularity increased. It became obvious that something had to be done. In July 1956, the seventh plenum of the Central Committee of the PZPR decided on the restoration of Gomułka's party card,⁴⁶ and on 21 October, at Ochab's instigation, he was elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR. One can hardly imagine a more complete form of rehabilitation: Gomułka had been restored to the exact same position he had lost in 1948. Spychalski, who was only set free in March 1956, was reappointed to the Central Committee and became Minister of Defence in Gomułka's new government, while Korczyński resumed his military career as head of Section II of the Polish

general staff and also served on the Central Committee from 1959. However, it should be added that this kind of recovery of former power and status was only available to a very small number of people repressed by the Stalinist regime – mainly the old guard in the PZPR. Ordinary people were dependent on the legal route, a much more tortuous path.

The limits of rehabilitation

In view of the large number of rehabilitation requests in the second half of 1956, and the slow pace at which they were dealt with, calls were made for the Sejm to establish a swifter process for making decisions or – better still – to introduce a general rehabilitation act. These calls led to nothing, as, alarmed at the growing volume of appeals for rehabilitations, the authorities began to phase out the scheme. This stance was adopted first, because of the increased confidence of the new leadership under Gomułka, who, following his election as party First Secretary in October 1956, soon set about reversing various aspects of the de-Stalinisation process, and second, for political reasons. If too many victims were rehabilitated, this would be tantamount to an admission not only that communism lacked widespread support in Poland, but, more damagingly still, that it had been introduced by force and in complete disregard of the law. The failed revolution in Hungary in October-November 1956 also gave a stark warning about the possible consequences of too much liberalisation. A statement by the Minister of Justice on 8 April 1957 provides a good example of this line of thinking. Referring to a discussion of the judicial system that had taken place in the Politburo, he argued that:

the leadership of the Ministry and the General Public Prosecutor's Office has given insufficient consideration to the rehabilitation procedure. Left uncontrolled, these matters are essentially shaped by the defence and prosecution, with the weighting in favour of the defence. The public prosecution and the defence teams were inadequately prepared for these trials in political terms. Furthermore, the press has presented these cases in the wrong light. As a result, rather than limiting themselves to rehabilitating particular persons who had fallen victim to false accusations, they were attempting to undertake the socio-political rehabilitation of entire milieu hostile to us.⁴⁷

The fact that in 1957 the problem of rehabilitation was treated as a political rather than a legal matter⁴⁸ is confirmed by the warning issued

by the former party First Secretary Ochab to members of the Politburo on 28 February 1957:

From time to time I find out through the press about new so-called rehabilitations and the annulment of court sentences passed in the former period, mainly in relation to members of the London underground or those accused of counter-revolutionary activity. None of the 'rehabilitation' cases has been referred to the Politburo.... We don't know who is responsible for issuing communiqués concerning rehabilitations, among these the 'rehabilitation' of undoubted enemies, to the press. We cannot remain blind to the enormous political significance of these sorts of practices.⁴⁹

A report from the Ministry of Justice's rehabilitation commission reveals that over the course of the 12 months from June 1956 to the end of May 1957, it received 1,717 applications for rehabilitation (although the Sejm Commission for the Administration of Justice later recorded many more). The Ministry launched appeals in 161 cases. Of these, 63 ended in the acquittal of the accused, 52 in the reopening of the case, 18 in the overturning of the sentence followed by the ordering of a retrial, nine in a re-categorisation of the alleged crime followed by a reduction in sentence, and 16 in a reduction in sentence without any re-categorisation of the original charge. There was also one case where the original verdict was annulled, one in which the material evidence was recalled and a final case where the sentence was revised in order to take account of time spent in pre-trial detention. The most common applications related to people condemned for counter-revolutionary offences (35), for attempting to overturn with force the 'democratic system of the Polish nation' (39), for crimes relating to the 31 August 1944 decree concerning Nazi and fascist war criminals (19),⁵⁰ and for cases in which the sentence had been passed on the basis of Article 22 of the 1946 small penal code.⁵¹ It should be noted that almost one third of applications for rehabilitation were refused by the Ministry of Justice (557 cases), either because it found no grounds for an appeal or because of inaccuracies in the application process. Over the course of more or less the same period (June 1956–15 May 1957), the First President of the High Court launched 107 appeals.⁵²

The rehabilitations consisted, above all, in the revision of unjust convictions and/or sentences. Many convictions were now considered unsafe as a result of falsification of incriminating evidence against the accused on the part of the former public security organs, forced confessions of guilt from the accused, false testimony given by witnesses, some of whom had also been coerced into telling lies about the accused,

and a recognition that some acts had been wrongly classified as 'crimes' on the basis of a distorted interpretation of the penal code.⁵³

A Commission for Support of Rehabilitated Persons was called into being to oversee the compensation package envisaged by the regime for those now deemed to have been unjustly convicted of a crime. It offered help in a number of forms, including financial aid to over 600 people, allocation of accommodation to over 200 people, granting of medical care to more than 350 people, provision of pensions to roughly 150 victims and their families, and assistance in finding work for around 130 people.⁵⁴

In cases where applications for rehabilitation were successful, it was often noted that unjust sentencing had been the consequence of inordinately severe legal categorisations of crimes and glaringly inappropriate punishments for the offence in question. Consequently, in 1956, the High Court reduced the sentence in around 100 cases, while, following a proposal from the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office, the High Military Court did so in 360 cases. In certain cases, after the annulment of a sentence, proceedings were discontinued on the basis of the amnesty of 27 April 1956 (in the High Court, this applied in 50 cases). In a handful of instances, after deciding that the sentence had been correct but that the condemned person had since been 're-educated', a conditional early release was granted. Persons deemed to have been justly convicted and appropriately sentenced could also be granted temporary release if ill-health or grave family circumstances demanded this. There were also cases in which people applied to the State Council for mercy.⁵⁵

Information provided to the Sejm Commission for the Administration of Justice on 9 July 1957 indicated that out of the total of 4,400 applications for rehabilitation that had been investigated, 2,500 were rejected, 900 were approved, and in the remaining 1,000 cases, the 'crime' was re-categorised to allow a less severe form of punishment. This meant that more than half of the convictions (56.8 per cent) placed under review by the courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office were upheld.⁵⁶

Despite these less than encouraging figures, there were still those, even after 1957, who were determined to pursue the case for their rehabilitation. The difficulties that these people faced in the late 1950s and the 1960s can be illustrated by analysing the fate of members of the group 'Freedom and Independence', which represented resettled Poles who had been forced from their homes in the Lvov region when this part of pre-war Poland was annexed to Ukraine in 1945. Most were now living in the Dolny Śląsk region of south-western Poland, which had been part of German Lower Silesia until the end of the war.⁵⁷ They (or their families) succeeded in bringing about the reopening of their case on the basis of an earlier appeal to the High Court. The retrial ended

in success when the Regional Court in Wrocław acquitted them of all charges, or, in the case of the death of one of the condemned, discontinued the proceedings on the basis of inability to determine whether a crime had been committed or not. A verdict such as this allowed the victims or their families to put in a claim for compensation and, where relevant, to demand the restoration of lost pension rights. However, even apparently successful cases such as this were far from simple. By way of an example, the High Court first reduced the sentence of one of the members of the group to three years (from five), and only after a second appeal arranged for the case to be reopened, resulting in retrial and acquittal.⁵⁸

As discussed above, the absence of a general rehabilitation act in the communist period greatly hindered the rehabilitation process. Because the political factor predominated over considerations of legality and justice, the next big wave of rehabilitation applications did not come until very near the end of the communist period, in the years 1988–1989. Finally, in 1991, a new era in legal history began when the post-communist government decided to pass a rehabilitation act of a general character. Convictions secured by the enforcement agencies and judicial and non-judicial bodies in the period between 1 January 1944 and 31 December 1956 could now be annulled if the activity that gave rise to the accusation was connected to demands for independent Polish statehood or protests against the collectivisation of villages and mandatory food deliveries. All victims could apply for this without the assistance of the authorities. Victims were entitled to compensation and damages paid by the Polish State Treasury and could also request that the court make details of the annulment available to the public.

Conclusion

Rehabilitation and compensation for past miscarriages of justice can only be genuine, and enjoy genuine popular respect and backing, if they take place in a spirit of openness and according to a set of principles agreed by the government and the governed. They cannot be an element in political game-playing. These principles were not observed by the Polish communist authorities in the years after 1956. Consequently, the injustices of the Stalinist period remained uncorrected and unrecognised. There are a number of reasons for this. First, of course, was the dependence of the Polish authorities on the Soviet Union. The necessity of continually keeping an eye on 'big brother' could not have been conducive to transparency of action and intention.

Second, the party leaders in communist Poland were themselves far from ideal representatives of the rule of law, and in crisis situations, they did not shy away from the use of force, as Gomułka was to show during the bloody suppression of the coastal shipyard disturbances in December 1970, for instance.

The fact that in the post-Stalinist period, Poland's communist rulers did not resort to the same levels of terror as their predecessors had used in the years 1944–1956 should not mislead us into thinking that they were at all interested in a moral reckoning with the Stalinist era. Instead they kept quiet out of fear that any open search for the truth would necessarily draw attention to their own misdeeds. Even Gomułka's experiences in prison in 1951–1954 did not tempt him into changing his position in this respect. Besides, too much digging around in the past might have resulted in awkward questions being raised about those officials who had been responsible for errors and misdeeds, and they, for the most part, continued to hold high-ranking positions, to fulfil important social roles, and – if they worked in the criminal justice system – to pass judgement on others. They were quite simply at the heart of the power apparatus. Moreover, some of them were protected by powerful figures in the Kremlin.

It is therefore no coincidence that during the Polish 'Thaw' of 1956–1957 only three high functionaries of the Ministry of Public Security were held legally responsible for the monstrous abuse of power in the Stalinist period.⁵⁹ There was also no purge or reform of the judiciary. Bearing in mind the circumstances outlined above, it can come as no surprise that the sort of rehabilitation conducted in these conditions did not fulfil public expectations. Of course, the release from prison of innocent people as a result of the 1956 amnesty and the payment of compensation to a small number of the victims of Stalinist-era justice was, in itself, a good thing. An added bonus was the return to Poland of those people who had hitherto been forced to remain in the territories of the USSR, and the family reunions that ensued. It seems that in this latter case, the Polish authorities were entirely dependent on the Soviet authorities. In other words, they cannot be held responsible for the delays in and partial nature of the repatriation scheme.

Both processes – repatriation and rehabilitation – were only carried out in a selective and grudging manner after 1954. While the Soviet Union wished to postpone and limit the departure of the Polish population from its territories, the Polish party and regime had little inclination to confront the past by conducting open rehabilitation proceedings. As a result, the range of options open to those seeking the correction of

past injustices or the overturning of false verdicts was severely limited, even in 1956–1957, and had narrowed to virtual insignificance by the 1960s. Many of the former victims of Stalinist terror did not live to see the 1990s, when they might have applied, once again, for appropriate compensation and recognition.

Notes

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1. For an extensive collection of testimonies from survivors of these deportations, see T. Jeśmanowa (ed.), *Stalin's Ethnic Cleansing in Eastern Poland: Tales of the Deported, 1940–1946*, trans. by E. J. Whittle and B. Kacperek (London, 2000).
2. On the domestic terror system in Poland and its many victims, see L. Kamiński, 'Stalinism in Poland, 1944–1956', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 78–97.
3. Ibid., p. 92.
4. The information in this paragraph is from P. Machcewicz, *Polski rok 1956* (Warsaw, 1993), p. 14.
5. On the aftermath and implications of the Poznań riot, see J. Granville, 'Poland and Hungary, 1956: A Comparative Essay Based on New Archival Findings', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 57–77.
6. Machcewicz, *Polski rok 1956*, p. 35.
7. J. Karpiński, *Portrety lat: Polska w odcinkach 1944–1993* (Warsaw, 1994), pp. 84–5.
8. Dz. U. [= *Dziennik Ustaw* or Journal of Laws, Poland's official legal gazette], no. 11 (1956), entry no. 57.
9. A. Skrzypek, 'O drugiej repatriacji Polaków z ZSRR (1954–1959)', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 98, no. 4 (1991), p. 63.
10. M. Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR w latach 1955–59* (Warsaw, 2000), p. 54. See also A. Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski 1939–1989* (Warsaw, 1995), p. 151.
11. Skrzypek, 'O drugiej repatriacji Polaków z ZSRR', p. 64.
12. Letter from J. Knapika, Vice-Director of the Department I MSZ, to the Ministry of Public Security, 14 April 1954, in Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, group 7, package 9, file 72, k. 26.
13. A. Kochański, *Polska 1944–1991. Informator historyczny, t. I* (Warsaw, 1996), p. 489.
14. Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR*, p. 75.
15. Ibid., pp. 101–2.
16. Skrzypek, 'O drugiej repatriacji Polaków z ZSRR', p. 65.
17. Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR*, p. 108.
18. Ibid., p. 170.

19. Ibid., p. 172.
20. Ibid., p. 255.
21. 'Informacja dotycząca liczby, struktury zawodowej i rozmieszczenia repatriatów w kraju z 24 kwietnia 1957', in B. Kącka and P. Stępka (eds), *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR 1955–1959: Wybór dokumentów* (Warsaw, 1994), p. 98.
22. All of the figures in the above paragraph come from Skrzypek, 'O drugiej repatriacji Polaków z ZSRR', pp. 70–2.
23. In 1955, 74 per cent of the returnees were resettled in the northern and eastern vojevodships (administrative provinces). In 1956, the figure was 72.5 per cent, in 1957, 83.3 per cent, in 1958, 74.1 per cent, and in 1959, 97.5 per cent. See *Repatriacja w okresie 1955–30. 06. 1959*, CAMSWiA, BPRzdsR, ref. no. 2, k. 8.
24. The following percentages of repatriates chose to settle in cities: in 1957, 58 per cent, in 1958, 53.8 per cent and in 1959, 70.7 per cent. See also M. Latuch, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej w latach 1955–1960 na tle zewnętrznych ruchów wędrownikowych* (Warsaw, 1994).
25. Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR*, p. 318.
26. Latuch, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej w latach*, p. 163.
27. Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR*, p. 374.
28. *Bijące serce partii: Dzienniki personalne Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego. 1945–1947*, edited by A.K. Kunert and R. Stolarski, vol. I (Warsaw, 2001), p. 11.
29. In the years 1952–1955 alone, 518,000 peasants were imprisoned for this offence. See Cz. Kozłowski, *Namiestnik Stalina* (Warsaw, 1993), p. 123.
30. J. Poksiński, 'TUN'. *Tatar – Utnik – Nowicki: Represje wobec oficerów Wojska Polskiego w latach 1949–1956* (Warsaw, 1992), p. 142.
31. Z. Rykowski and W. Władyka, *Polska próba – Październik '56* (Krakow, 1989), p. 87.
32. W. Władyka, *Na czołowce: Prasa w październiku 1956* (Warsaw and Lodz, 1989), p. 183.
33. Poksiński, 'TUN'. *Tatar – Utnik – Nowicki*, p. 144.
34. Dz. U. 1956 no. 11 entry no. 57.
35. Karpiński, *Portrety lat*, p. 85.
36. Dz. U. 1956 no. 11 entry no. 57.
37. D. Maksymiuk, *Problem rehabilitacji w latach 1956–1957: Miscellanea Historico-Iuridica, T. VIII* (Białystok, 2009), p. 225.
38. Protokół Nr 24/56 z posiedzenia Kolegium Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości w dniu 27 grudnia 1956 r., AAN, MS, 1/106, k. 7.
39. A. Lityński, *Historia prawa Polski Ludowej* (Warsaw, 2013), p. 149.
40. M. R. D. Foot, *Six Faces of Courage* (London, 1978), pp. 105–19.
41. A. Cyra, *Wiesław J. Wysocki, Rotmistrz Pilecki* (Warsaw, 1997), pp. 209–10.
42. M. Fieldorf, *Leszek Zachęta, Generał 'NIL' August Emil Fieldorf: Fakty, dokumenty, relacje* (Warsaw, 1993), p. 270–6.
43. Wybrane dokumenty rehabilitacyjne. (Stan na dzień 10 XII 1989), Wydanie specjalne 'Problemów Praworządności' (Warsaw, 1989), pp. 9–13.
44. J. Eisler, *Siedmiu wspaniałych: Poczet pierwszych sekretarzy KC PZPR* (Warsaw, 2014), p. 200.
45. P. Machcewicz, *Władysław Gomułka* (Warsaw, 1995), p. 33.
46. Ibid., p. 39.

47. Protokół nr 9/57 z posiedzenia Kolegium Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości z dnia 8 kwietnia 1957 r., AAN, MS, 1/213, k. 61.
48. Maksymiuk, *Problem rehabilitacji w latach*, p. 232.
49. Z. J. Poksiński and V. Honos, *'Spisek w wojsku'* (Warsaw, 1994), p. 167.
50. Dekret PKWN z dnia 31 sierpnia 1944 r. o wymiarze kary dla faszystowsko-hitlerowskich zbrodniarzy winnych zabójstw i znęcania się nad ludnością cywilną i jeńcami oraz dla zdrajców Narodu Polskiego, Dz. U. 1944, nr 4, entry no. 16.
51. Dekret z dnia 13 czerwca 1946 r. o przestępstwach szczególnie niebezpiecznych w okresie odbudowy Państwa, Dz. U. 1946, nr 30, entry no. 192, Art. 22.
52. Sprawozdanie z czynności Komisji Rehabilitacyjnej Ministerstwa Sprawiedliwości za okres od czerwca 1956 r. do dn. 28 V 1957, AAN, MS, 1/376, k. 16–39.
53. Maksymiuk, *Problem rehabilitacji w latach*, pp. 229–30.
54. Dane za J. Bednarzak, 'Rehabilitacja osób niesłusznie skazanych', *Nowe Drogi*, vol. 2 (1957), pp. 121–2.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
56. M. Mazur, 'Sens rehabilitacji', *Prawo i Życie*, no. 16 (1957), p. 1.
57. W. Kupiec, 'Procesy odszkodowawcze członków AK i WIN z terenu Lwowa i województwa lwowskiego w Sądzie Wojewódzkim we Wrocławiu w latach 1960–1969', *Semper Fidelis*, no. 1 (1995), pp. 3–8.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
59. In 1964, the National Assembly pardoned them and they walked free.

5

The Limits of Rehabilitation: The 1930s Stalinist Terror and Its Legacy in Post-1953 East Germany

Matthew Stibbe

The Stalinist terror of the years 1936–1953 claimed millions of victims, including hundreds of German anti-fascists who had gone to the Soviet Union in the 1930s as political émigrés (*Politemigranten* or *Ostemigranten*) on the orders of the German Communist Party (KPD).¹ Those who survived and later took up residence in post-war East Germany (the GDR), as opposed to the West German Federal Republic (the FRG) or West Berlin, fall into three categories. First was a very small number of KPD functionaries who had already been rehabilitated by various organs of Soviet justice and readmitted to the KPD exile group in Moscow as a result of the ‘mini-thaw’ of late 1938 to early 1940. Typically they were able to return to Germany in 1945 or shortly afterwards.² Second, there was a handful of individuals who came back in the late 1940s, usually as a result of the direct intervention of the future GDR President Wilhelm Pieck. Among them were Werner Eberlein, son of the murdered KPD functionary Hugo Eberlein, who was repatriated in 1948 and went on to have an illustrious career in East Germany, rising to the Politburo by 1986;³ Susanne Leonhard, mother of the senior party official and Comintern school graduate Wolfgang Leonhard who later defected to the west;⁴ and Fridolin and Horst Seydewitz, sons of the first post-war Minister-President of the East German state of Saxony, Max Seydewitz.⁵ Taken together, these first two categories added up to about 30 persons.⁶ Between 1949 and 1954 there were virtually no German returnees from the Gulag and hardly any repatriation of former émigrés at all. This was a time when East Germany’s rulers took a hard line on alleged ‘traitors’ and ‘enemies of the party’, defending the show trials that had taken place in the Soviet Union in the late 1930s while instigating their own campaigns against ‘deviationists’, ‘Trotskyists’ and ‘sectarians’.⁷ The third,

and largest, group of surviving German victims – consisting of around 150 ex-prisoners and their dependents – had to wait until after Stalin's death in March 1953 before receiving the news that they could finally go home. Between 1954 and 1962, most of them received permission to settle in the GDR.⁸

Using memoirs of German communists who were repatriated in the 1950s and early 1960s after years spent in Soviet camps, as well as official party records and newspaper sources, this chapter will explore the practical and discursive limits of the rehabilitation process in East Germany. It will also assess how far the widening of knowledge about Stalin's crimes led to a 'reworking of the political imaginary'⁹ inside the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED). The term 'political imaginary' requires some explanation. On the one hand, following Susan Buck-Morss, it can refer to the general desire in both east and west for 'representational concreteness' when it came to exhibiting (supposedly still realisable) 'utopian visions' and 'collective goals' to a mass public in face of the constant uncertainties thrown up by events in world politics. Lenin and Stalin, of course, both featured strongly in the 'political imaginary' of all Soviet bloc countries. But the classic communist trope of a 'vanguard party' boldly 'making "history"' by guiding the people towards a final victorious assault against a range of capitalist, reactionary and 'Trotskyist' foes¹⁰ was magnified in the GDR's case by its status as a 'border region' in the European theatre of the Cold War, with the 'enemy' actually on the doorstep in West Berlin and the FRG;¹¹ and also by the rapid domination of the SED by a group of communists whose experiences of underground activism at home and in exile in the 1930s and early 1940s had made them particularly suspicious of alleged 'spies', 'revisionists' and 'counter-revolutionaries'. The East German labour historian Jürgen Kuczynski, who joined the party in 1930 and was an ardent Stalinist and member of the SED inner elite until he fell out of favour with the leadership in 1956–1959, later wrote of the period of illegal struggle before 1945:

Those years turned us into better comrades, into better fighters for progress – but they did not let us be amiable people.... We become deeply distrustful in our daily lives, while at the same time putting all our confidence in the great path of humanity, in the future, in youth, in the victory of the good and the beautiful.¹²

More parochially, 'political imaginary' can denote the sense of historical mission and purpose that the SED communicated to its members,

both young and old, to GDR citizens more broadly, and to external supporters and opponents. What part did continuing silence, censorship and self-censorship in relation to the Stalinist purges have in the cultural reproduction of this East German narrative of past and present achievements? And how important an influence was the GDR's intense rivalry with the 'capitalist-imperialist' FRG, including growing tensions over rearmament and the status of Berlin in the late 1950s?¹³ In order to answer these questions, this chapter will make some reference to the many victims of Soviet military justice, East German political trials and other manifestations of Stalinist terror in Germany in the years 1945–1955, whose post-1956 claims for rehabilitation were, by and large, ignored by the SED and whose convictions were often only quashed, if at all, by German or Russian courts in the 1990s.¹⁴ However, the main focus will be on German purge victims of the 1930s who were released from the Soviet camp system after 1954, usually after being formally acquitted by Soviet district or central courts; repatriated to their homeland, on the understanding that their homeland was the GDR; and in most cases readmitted to the party, in or around the year 1956.

Political context

Founded in October 1949, the GDR rapidly became one of the most hard-line communist states in Eastern Europe, particularly after SED First Secretary Walter Ulbricht announced the 'accelerated construction of socialism' in 1952. Although forced into some concessions following the failed popular uprising of 17 June 1953, especially on the social and economic fronts,¹⁵ the regime soon reverted to political type. In 1956, its leaders could congratulate themselves on having avoided the big show trials of the late 1940s and early 1950s which had blighted neighbouring communist countries like Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, although evidence suggests that the leaders planned such a trial and merely called it off at the last minute.¹⁶ Yet even without a show trial, there had been several rounds of expulsions from the ruling party from 1948 onwards, secret trials held without public knowledge, and numerous convictions of party members and ordinary citizens, as well as ex-Nazis and 'capitalists', for political or quasi-political offences.¹⁷

In total, 13,127 persons were still serving sentences in East German jails for 'crimes against the state' in the first quarter of 1956, accounting for 31.2 per cent of the prison population.¹⁸ Only in the wake of Khrushchev's 'secret speech' in February 1956 to the 20th Party

Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) did these numbers begin to fall. The regime itself claimed to have pardoned or granted early release to 11,896 persons in the course of its immediate post-March 1956 investigations of past court cases and sentencing practices, and a total of 21,000 persons by October of that year.¹⁹ Among those regaining their freedom (albeit without having their convictions overturned) were several thousand ex-Nazis, 'Titoists', centre-right politicians and Social Democrats who had been condemned by Soviet military tribunals (in the period up to January 1950) or East German courts (after 1950) for 'misdeeds related to Hitler's war', 'anti-Soviet agitation' or 'collaboration with western intelligence agencies'.²⁰ The official SED press emphasised in April 1956 that the reductions in sentence were a political good-will gesture towards the west, including the Social Democratic Party (SPD), in line with Khrushchev's 'peaceful co-existence' policy and the recent 'strengthening of socialist and anti-militarist forces throughout the world', and in no way represented an acknowledgement of the prisoners' innocence.²¹ If the overall release figures for 1956 are accurate, however, then the beneficiaries must have included a considerable number of people convicted of 'ordinary' criminal offences, and not just those serving sentences for political crimes. Indeed, at the end of 1956 there were still 6,044 political prisoners in East Germany, making up 33.9 per cent of all those in jail, a higher proportion than at the beginning of the year.²²

Against this background, the fate of surviving German purge victims in the Soviet Union remained a highly sensitive (albeit largely hidden) issue, with the potential to do serious damage to both the GDR's international standing and its relationship with the Soviet Union. In contrast to the releases from East German prisons, which at least received periodic mention in the press, it was not a subject for public discussion. But equally it could not be ignored in the hope that it would simply go away. Between 1948 and the mid-1950s, the SED's leaders had defended the 1930s purges in absolute terms, while acting on the assumption that there were no 'innocent' victims.²³ A similar attitude was prevalent in the SED's sister parties, the West German Communist Party (KPD), which was active until a ban imposed by the federal constitutional court in 1956, and the SEW, the Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin.²⁴ For instance, all three parties vigorously denounced as 'anti-Soviet propaganda' the claims made by Margarete Buber-Neumann, wife of the murdered KPD functionary Heinz Neumann, in her 1949 report *Als Gefangene bei Stalin und Hitler*. Published in the west but banned in the east, this book provided a distressing account of her husband's arrest

and execution, and of her own experiences of betrayal and imprisonment in the Soviet Union, followed by delivery into the clutches of the Gestapo and incarceration at Ravensbrück, one of the Nazis' main concentration camps for women prisoners, in 1940–1945.²⁵

The negative stance taken by the three German communist parties was supported by the Soviet authorities who usually refused exit visas to convicted foreign prisoners, even if they had served their sentences, and in many cases condemned former Gulag inmates to further terms of imprisonment or banishment in the late 1940s and early 1950s.²⁶ The Kremlin was also at one with the GDR in believing that returnees could either disrupt East German society or – if they moved to West Germany via the still-open border in Berlin – provide further material for anti-communist and human rights groups agitating against the Soviet system. Indeed, although by 1951–1952 persistent enquiries from relatives had forced the SED to draw up a list of close to 180 German men and women missing in the Soviet Union, at least 32 of whom were long-term Gulag inmates or anti-fascists murdered in the purges, it is questionable whether this list was ever handed on to the Soviet authorities. In their internal correspondence, party officials used the uncertainty over whether the Soviets would even allow exit visas to such persons as an excuse for inaction.²⁷

After 1953, these assumptions could no longer be taken for granted, however. In the first instance, the revision and/or overturning of hundreds of thousands of political sentences in the USSR in the wake of the May 1954 decree 'On the Re-examination of Criminal Cases of Persons Convicted of Counter-Revolutionary Offences' was accompanied by the removal of any objections on the part of the Soviet Council of Ministers to the repatriation of rehabilitated foreign political internees. Information obtained by the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs via the East German embassy in Moscow indicated that a growing number of German communist ex-prisoners wanted to leave the Soviet Union and had been granted the necessary exit visas. Second, the establishment of normal diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and West Germany following West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's state visit to Moscow in September 1955 raised concerns that the Soviet authorities could decide to send released German communist prisoners to the FRG if the GDR refused to accept them. Here they might be tempted to reveal the truth about what had happened to them under Stalin, following the example of the West German survivor Margarete Buber-Neumann or the communist defector Susanne Leonhard, who, like her son, had left East Germany in 1949 and settled

in the FRG in 1950, eventually publishing a memoir of her time in the Gulag in 1956.²⁸ Admittedly, the ban on the KPD in West Germany in August 1956 made it less likely that returning victims who were still convinced communists would choose the FRG over the GDR. However, West Berlin, which had become an important centre of dissident left and human rights activism, as well as being a launch pad for many western intelligence and propaganda operations against the Soviet bloc, remained an alternative option, at least until the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.²⁹

Finally, the release of prisoners from the Gulag, including surviving German victims, presented the regime in East Berlin with similar dilemmas to the release of the last former German POWs of the Second World War from Soviet military captivity and their repatriation to East and West Germany, a process which itself was just coming to an end in 1955–1956.³⁰ Among the latter were real or presumed Nazi war criminals who had been convicted and sentenced by Soviet military tribunals for heinous offences against Soviet civilians during the 1941–1945 period, and who were now being amnestied as part of a diplomatic charm offensive aimed at winning over Germans in both the FRG and the GDR. Yet the official GDR line until 1955 was that purged German communists must also have been saboteurs and traitors, placing them on a par with Nazi war criminals. The idea that they might have been victims of malicious denunciations, miscarriages of justice or unlawful purges carried out by organs of the Soviet state required a considerable readjustment of previous mind sets and beliefs, both before and after Khrushchev's 'secret speech' in February 1956.

Repatriations 1955–1962

The first official recognition in the SED records that current and future applications for repatriation from the USSR made via the East German embassy in Moscow might include significant numbers of people seeking to return home after years of Soviet imprisonment or banishment came in an internal document produced by the Central Committee's cadre department on 7 February 1955. The document provided the names of 68 adults and their dependants who had been granted exit visas by the Soviet authorities since 1954 and were requesting entry to the GDR. Some of them had previously appeared on lists of persons who had been refused Soviet exit visas, but now had been granted them; others were entirely new names. It was recommended 'that in every case where a permit has been obtained to leave the Soviet Union, entry

should also be granted to the German Democratic Republic', but that only those who could prove continuous membership of the KPD, the CPSU or the latter's youth wing, the Komsomol, should be automatically accepted into the SED. By contrast, 'in cases where membership has been suspended for long periods in the past, or where doubts exist, an investigation or clarification should be undertaken by the ZPKK [Central Party Control Commission]'.³¹

In anticipation of the destitute state of some of the returnees, it was also recommended that they each be offered a 'transition allowance' (*Überbrückungsgeld*) of up to 2,000 marks from state funds, depending on their individual and family circumstances. In order to prevent them all from concentrating in Berlin, which had limited municipal resources to help the sick and old among them, and in view of the danger that some might be tempted, if in Berlin, to consider moving west or to try making contact with western relatives, it was recommended that those without firm ties to the German capital be dispersed across all 14 provincial regions (*Bezirke*) of the GDR. In practice, though, by April 1959, 128 returnees and their families were registered as living in East Berlin, representing by far the largest concentration of ex-Gulag prisoners in the whole of the republic.³²

This initial document was followed by two others. On 21 September 1955 the ZPKK, acting as the party's supreme tribunal, agreed to set up a special commission led by three senior party officials whose purpose would be to examine the 'affairs of comrades who have previously spent long periods in the Soviet Union', and to draw up some criteria for rehabilitation 'so that a concrete judgement can be made in each case'.³³ On 19 April 1956, in its first report, the special commission recommended the following course of action to the Politburo:

1. ...the ZPKK should be assigned with the task of interviewing returning emigrants from the Soviet Union and deciding on their rehabilitation.
2. In cases where the families of comrades imprisoned in the Soviet Union make enquiries on their behalf, the ZPKK should determine whether a rehabilitation [*in absentia* or *post-mortem*] is possible.³⁴

By this time, the first returnees had already begun to arrive. The figures vary, depending on the source, but party records suggest a total of 114 families, made up of 209 individuals, had come back between May 1955 and October 1956.³⁵ Even so, more were expected. On 1 August 1956, the Central Committee passed a resolution calling for a 'faster

repatriation of former *Politemigranten* and their dependants from the USSR' and for extra state funds to help with travel arrangements:

For ... those whose material circumstances are not good, the GDR's embassy in Moscow will cover the costs of acquiring a Soviet exit visa and the entire costs of the journey from current place of residence to Berlin.³⁶

To speed up the process at the Soviet end, the Central Committee's cadre department also recommended the immediate despatch of a party official to Moscow whose job would be to resolve practical and other difficulties.

[Returning] comrades have informed us that ... a large number of *Politemigranten* remain scattered in the furthest reaches of the Soviet Union, and are anxious about approaching the GDR's embassy ... Comrade Viktor Leist, who returned in February 1956, even found himself arrested on the street when he left the embassy building [in Moscow], and was subsequently interrogated about the purpose of his visit there.... A further difficulty lies in the fact that many comrades do not even know where the GDR embassy is. For instance, Comrade Walter Höfer told us that when, in May this year, he was released from 20 years of internment by a commission in Karaganda, neither the Information Office, nor the Interior Ministry, nor the militia in Moscow could give him the address of the embassy. Finally ... a Polish student found it for him....³⁷

Most of the returnees came by train, arriving at Berlin's *Ostbahnhof* (eastern railway station) where they were met by a delegation sent by the party's Central Committee. Temporary accommodation was provided in special party-owned hotels in Berlin, after which the returnees were dispersed to more permanent lodgings. Those arriving in 1956 reported receiving up to 5,400 marks to help find new houses or flats, as well as special ration cards usually reserved for senior party members.³⁸ Indeed, the Central Committee's cadre department had recommended an increase in the maximum *Überbrückungsgeld* to 4,000 marks at the end of 1955 and to 6,000 marks in October 1956.³⁹

In 1957 and 1958, further repatriations took place, particularly following an agreement signed between the GDR and the Soviet Union on 7 January 1957 concerning family reunions. Even in the early 1960s, one or two cases were still outstanding. In total, around 180 German

emigrants who had survived the Stalinist terror were repatriated to the GDR between May 1945 and June 1962, nearly all of them (150 or so) after 1954.⁴⁰ Between October 1955 and July 1962, the ZPKK decided on restoration of party membership in 257 cases. For 66 individuals, rehabilitation was granted posthumously or – where exact details were unknown – ‘after presumed death’. Among them were the above-mentioned Hugo Eberlein and several other prominent KPD functionaries shot in Moscow in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Hermann Remmele and Leo Friedländer. This represented a mere fraction of the total number of murdered political émigrés, however, and some conspicuous names were still missing.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the majority of the 257 rehabilitations were granted to living persons who had returned since 1954 to the GDR and who in many cases had been formally acquitted of past criminal offences before leaving the Soviet Union. A lucky few, who seem to have had run-ins with the KPD exile group only, and not the NKVD, were merely hoping to have reprimands expunged from their party records. However, most of the returnees had been formally expelled from the KPD following their arrest by the Soviet secret police, and were now being *instructed* to seek readmission to the SED as part of the rehabilitation process. What kind of welcome did they get, beyond an interview with officials from the ZPKK followed by formal confirmation of restoration of party membership?

Ulbricht, rehabilitations and the limits of de-Stalinisation

Although the East German regime pardoned or granted early release to several thousand of its own political and criminal prisoners in 1956 (and again in 1960), it did not have the same judicial powers to alter verdicts or sentences passed by organs of the Soviet state. Rehabilitation of returning German communist victims of the 1930s purges was therefore a separate, quasi-judicial process with its own political logic and rationale as determined by the ruling SED and its central apparatus.⁴² The purpose, at least as far as the ZPKK and the majority of Politburo members were concerned, was to make restored party membership and the privileges that went with it the basis for renewed discipline and control, not to correct past injustices or to open up awkward questions about the Stalinist past. Indeed, the potential for a more drastic rethink of the GDR’s ‘political imaginary’ along anti-Stalinist lines was thwarted by the SED’s leaders even before the conservative backlash that followed the crushing of the Hungarian uprising at the end of 1956. After February 1956, Ulbricht was obliged to look as if he were following

Khrushchev's lead by denouncing the 'cult of personality' as a distortion of 'Leninist norms of party life' and rejecting Stalin as one of the great classic theorists of Marxism.⁴³ However, when it came to other aspects of de-Stalinisation, he always managed to stay one or two paces behind. In a speech to a closed session of the Central Committee in late July 1956, for instance, Ulbricht blamed the former Soviet Minister of the Interior Lavrentii Beria rather than Stalin for the 1930s purges, and suggested that the GDR had already defeated Beria's attempts to stage a show trial within its borders in 1953.⁴⁴ There had been, it seemed, no major breach of socialist legality and no problematic 'cult of personality' in East Germany. Rather than allow a potentially divisive discussion of this apparent non-issue, the party had to maintain 'a firm line' [*eine feste Linie*] in face of attempts by enemies past and present to sow discord within its ranks.⁴⁵

After July 1956, the implication of these claims became more obvious. While the regime paid lip-service to the need for reform, anti-Stalinist intellectuals came under increased pressure, a process which culminated in the arrest, prosecution and imprisonment of the philosopher Wolfgang Harich and the head of the Aufbau publishing house Walter Janka, both of whom received long prison terms after trials in March and July 1957. Several other leading critics of Ulbricht were jailed, purged from the party or senior party positions, expelled from universities or forced to recant in a wave of repression lasting into 1958 and beyond.⁴⁶ Among those who fell under suspicion during this period was Nathan Steinberger, a rehabilitated returnee in 1955 who, because he chose to remain active in the Jewish community in East Berlin and cultivated contacts with relatives in Britain and Belgium, was removed from his position as departmental chief in the state planning commission in 1958.⁴⁷ Altogether, although the number of political prisoners in the GDR fell to a low of 4,965 in the second quarter of 1957, it rose steadily over the next year or so, to reach 7,913 by the third quarter of 1958. The new amnesty announced in October 1960 led to the release of 15,621 prisoners, including 3,366 'politicals', but the total count for the latter crept up again to 8,117 by the end of 1961. This was in spite of the fact that Ulbricht's internal authority was immeasurably strengthened by the building of the Berlin Wall in August of that year.⁴⁸

In the meantime, after 1962, repatriations from the Soviet Union were officially considered to have been completed, and a line was drawn under the internal process of rehabilitation.⁴⁹ True, in nearly all of the cases it examined between 1955 and 1962, the ZPKK had found in favour of restoration of unbroken party membership. For some

returnees, this meant that they could now claim to have been loyal comrades for 30 or even 40 years, while all traces of what had happened to them in Soviet exile were expunged from their party record. One early example of this re-writing of party history came in 1958, in the run-up to the 40th anniversary of the November 1918 revolution. The official SED newspaper *Neues Deutschland* carried an article by the veteran communist Martha Globig, who recalled how, as a 17-year-old activist in the Spartacist League, she had taken part in the founding conference of the pro-communist FSJ (*Freie Sozialistische Jugend*) on 27 October 1918 and in an anti-war march in Berlin on 28 October 1918. The protestors were blocked by the Imperial German police, but:

... the young people at the head of the march would not allow themselves to be intimidated and sought to break through the cordon. Arrests followed. When we sought to free the prisoners, the police shot at us at blank range and wounded Comrade [Fritz] Globig in the arm. The crowd pulled back but then surged forward again with renewed determination.... In this way, the delegates representing young workers from across Germany had not only organised a spirited conference, but stood shoulder to shoulder with their comrades from Berlin in the battle for the streets.⁵⁰

For the co-writer of the *Neues Deutschland* piece, this made Globig a role model for socialist youth in the GDR:

The heroism and sacrifice of young workers in the decades-long revolutionary struggle has paved the way for what we have and take for granted today. Because the working class holds the reigns of power, because it has smashed the power of the militarists, the old rulers are also no longer able to monopolise education [and] our young people now have equal rights and opportunities for development. On 16 November [1958] our young voters, as fully-fledged citizens, will make their own stand against militarism and war, thereby safeguarding their bright and glorious future.⁵¹

What the article failed to mention, however, was that Globig had spent almost 20 years as a Gulag prisoner in the Soviet Union. Her conviction had been quashed by a Moscow court in December 1955, and she had been able to return to Germany in April 1956. Her formal rehabilitation and reacceptance into the party was subsequently ratified by the ZPKK in October 1956, which agreed to backdate her party membership

to 1917.⁵² She was given a job in the party's Institute for Marxism–Leninism (IML), and in July 1961 she was honoured with an official announcement of her 60th birthday in *Neues Deutschland*, a mark of recognition reserved for esteemed party veterans.⁵³ However, although her carefully reconstructed past was now held up as an inspiration to East German youth, and although she was called upon by the IML to record her autobiographical memories for the benefit of the 'Memoir Section' (*Sektor Erinnerungen*) of the Central Party Archive in 1962, it was made clear to her – and she accepted – that she could not discuss her experiences in the Soviet Union in public.⁵⁴ The SED needed heroes, not victims. Ordinary party members and the general public were left entirely in the dark about the rehabilitation process, while even the rehabilitees were only informed verbally about the decision to readmit them. They were provided with no formal documentation, and indeed were required to hand over any Soviet documents in their possession – especially those pertaining to their arrest, imprisonment, release and judicial rehabilitation – to the party officials who came to meet them at Berlin's *Ostbahnhof*.⁵⁵

The majority of East Germans were also kept in the dark about developments in the Soviet Union post-1956, including further revelations about Stalin's crimes in the 1930s and beyond. From the party's perspective, the situation in the GDR differed from that in the USSR, for in the former there had supposedly never been any terroristic personal dictatorship, arrests of innocent people or abuse of state power, and therefore there was no need to use rehabilitation as a means of emancipating society from fear of arbitrary persecution. The fact that senior KPD functionaries had remained silent or looked the other way while the Soviet authorities surrendered at least 350 German and Austrian anti-fascists to the Gestapo between November 1939 and May 1941 was conveniently forgotten, and significantly both Margarete Buber-Neumann and her murdered husband, Heinz Neumann officially remained 'traitors' to the communist cause, rather than being recast as innocent victims of the 1930s purges.⁵⁶ Efforts were also made to stop detailed knowledge of Khrushchev's 1956 speech from spreading beyond the senior levels of the party,⁵⁷ and in 1962, during an official trip to Crimea, Ulbricht responded to news of the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's short novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by pointedly telling the Soviet leader: 'We will never allow such camp literature in the GDR!' [*Bei uns wird keine Lagerliteratur veröffentlicht!*]. This remark has the added poignancy that it was uttered in the presence of the former terror victim Werner Eberlein, who by the late 1950s had become Ulbricht's

chief interpreter on official visits to the USSR and was therefore obliged to translate it into Russian for Khrushchev's benefit.⁵⁸

The threat posed by Solzhenitsyn's book could be dealt with quite simply by banning it in the GDR, a move formally announced by Ulbricht in his closing address to a meeting between top party and state officials and East German writers and artists in March 1963.⁵⁹ In the early 1960s, the SED's propaganda machine also cynically exploited the international publicity given to the trial of the Holocaust's chief architect, Adolf Eichmann, in Jerusalem – and to trials of SS and other war criminals in the FRG – to focus attention on (West) Germany's Nazi past rather than the GDR's Stalinist past and present.⁶⁰ When, in the immediate aftermath of the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, the West German novelist Günter Grass described Ulbricht as a 'concentration camp commandant' in an open letter to the President of the East German Writers' Association, Anna Seghers, this too was dismissed as an imperialist distortion.⁶¹ As long as none of its own cultural luminaries sought to raise difficult questions about the subject of Stalinism – in other words, provided they remained focused on the achievements of socialism, the reactionary, bestial nature of Nazism and the existence of former Nazis in the West German establishment – the East German regime felt reasonably safe.

In 1964–1965, however, the senior SED officials in charge of cultural policy, notably the Politburo's ideology chief, Kurt Hager, and Ulbricht's successor-in-waiting, Erich Honecker, became increasingly concerned that a number of East German writers were spreading a sceptical view of the regime's approach to de-Stalinisation, especially through publications in the west or at international gatherings of artists from socialist countries. Three people in particular were singled out for criticism by Honecker at the 11th Plenary Session of the Central Committee in December 1965: the novelist Stefan Heym, the poet and song-writer Wolf Biermann, and the scientist Robert Havemann. Underlying these concerns were also broader fears that East German youth, if exposed to radical rejections of the Stalinist past, might become less wary of the 'false' attractions of the west, especially as so many teenagers were already becoming fans of 1960s 'Beat Music' with its anti-authoritarian ethos and apparent threat to public order.⁶²

Of the three writers in question, Heym showed the greatest interest in the issue of German victims of the 1930s and 1940s purges in the Soviet Union. This was particularly after discovering the fate of his friend, the anti-fascist writer Ernst Ottwalt, who disappeared into the clutches of the NKVD in Moscow in 1936 after being denounced by a German

comrade and – as became known in 1958 – died in a Siberian prison camp in 1943.⁶³ In 1963, Heym began writing a novel, *The Architects*, motivated in part by his distress at Ottwalt's fate, and set in the East Germany of 1955–1956. It told the story of a successful and much-admired communist architect, Arnold Sundstrom, whose professional and personal life is turned upside down by the return from the Gulag of a former colleague he had known in Soviet exile, and by his own refusal to face up to what had happened during those dark times. Although the novel was never released in the GDR, and indeed did not appear in print at all until 2000,⁶⁴ its core underlying themes made their way into several critical speeches and articles Heym delivered in the period 1964–1965, some of which – having been banned at home – were later published in the west. The most provocative of these was an uninvited, impromptu address to a colloquium organised by the East German Writers' Association, which took place in Berlin in the presence of guests from other Soviet bloc countries in December 1964, a few weeks after Khrushchev's fall from power. Copies of the speech were handed out freely to journalists, one appearing in the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* in February 1965.⁶⁵ Another copy ended up in the hands of Kurt Hager, who sent it to members of the Politburo as a cause for concern, with a covering note also mentioning the fact that Polish and Soviet delegates had criticised the GDR for refusing to allow the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich* or the official distribution of works by European classical and modernist authors like Proust, Kafka and Joyce, all of which were now freely circulating in their own countries.⁶⁶

Heym's speech began with a tale about a Soviet writer who submitted a film script to the Kremlin with the line 'Stalin vacates the room', only to have it sent back with a correction made in the dictator's own hand, so that it now read 'The *great* Stalin vacates the room'. His criticism, however, was directed less at Stalin and more at the many cultural functionaries in East Germany who now eagerly denounced or mocked the 'cult of personality', to which they were once subordinated, but otherwise tolerated continued 'lies and pretences'⁶⁷ about the past, and in so doing, failed to recognise the moral imperative 'that we must now sweep out the dirt from underneath the carpet, wash the carpet itself, and disinfect the room that Stalin has vacated'. The counter-argument, that greater openness about Stalin's crimes could be used by the capitalist world to undermine socialism, was in his view spurious: 'We should not fear the pain which comes with seeking out the truth. The truth is always revolutionary....'⁶⁸ However, this Orwellian definition of truth was exactly what Honecker chose to criticise in his speech to the 11th

plenum in December 1965, describing it as 'an ideology based on petit-bourgeois scepticism' (*eine Ideologie des spießbürgerlichen Skeptizismus*) which had no place in contemporary East Germany: 'Our GDR is a clean state. It holds to uncompromising standards of ethics and morality, decency and good habits.'⁶⁹ Like Biermann and Havemann, Heym found that his works were no longer discussed in East German universities, that his mail was intercepted, and that in effect his attempts to open up an honest discussion about Stalinism had been met with a brick wall of censure and censorship. Only in the mid-1970s did East German publishing houses again dare to bring out editions of some of his less controversial writings.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The 11th plenum in December 1965 signalled the end of all efforts to link rehabilitations to an open political confrontation with the causes and consequences of East Germany's Stalinist past, a position which lasted for at least the next two decades. Behind the scenes, returnees were rewarded for their silence and continued loyalty. Some were provided with jobs in the party or party-controlled research institutes. Others secured positions in academia or the media. One or two came to the attention of the East German secret police, the *Stasi*. Among them was the history professor and former penal camp inmate Wolfgang Ruge, who was denounced in 1980 for making incautious remarks about his years in Soviet exile – and in the same breath criticising the SED's control over history writing – at a meeting of the party committee at the research institute where he had worked since 1956.⁷¹ Most returnees were simply ignored, however, and had no outlets for describing their inner feelings. In an essay published in the 1990s, the East German Peter Erler convincingly showed how women returnees, especially those who were single, widowed or beyond working age, 'suffered in particular as a result of the party-imposed silence and the need to deny a part of their own identities'.⁷² Expressions of private grief and sorrow indeed had no place in the classic narrative conventions of communist life writing.⁷³

What of the longer-term impact of the rehabilitation process on the SED as a ruling party? Given that many of the German victims of the 1930s purges had been old Spartacists like Martha and Fritz Globig, or daughters and sons of old Spartacists, the rehabilitations of 1955–1962 meant a small but significant strengthening of this wing of the party, as opposed to the Ulbricht faction, which represented those who had only joined the KPD in late 1920 when the party merged with the left-wing

of the Independent Socialists (USPD).⁷⁴ True, only one rehabilitated victim, Werner Eberlein, made it into the Politburo, and he had returned to Germany much earlier, in 1948. In general, those who worked their way up to the Central Committee or to positions as deputy ministers had, like Eberlein, already come back to the Soviet occupation zone before 1949. But a number of the post-1954 returnees did gain entry into the lower ranks of party officialdom, including Fritz Globig, the ex-husband of the above-named Martha Globig, who worked for the regional party leadership in Leipzig after returning to the GDR in 1955 and who was a recipient of the Karl Marx Order in 1962,⁷⁵ or the Prague-born German-Jewish communist Adele Schiffmann, who was arrested in Smolensk in 1938, returned to the GDR in 1959 as a newly rehabilitated purge victim and had several honours bestowed on her, such as the 'medal for fighters against fascism' (as early as 1959); the German-Soviet friendship award in gold (1974); the *Vaterländischer Verdienstorden* in bronze (1975) and silver (1985); and the Hermann Duncker medal (1981).⁷⁶ In this sense, it would be wrong to say that 1956 was entirely 'business as usual' for the SED or that the rehabilitation on offer was a mere sham or *Scheinrehabilitierung*.⁷⁷ Some changes and adjustments had been necessary, however small and however cosmetic.

It is in respect to transforming the broader 'political imaginary' in the GDR and 're-evaluat[ing] ... the status of the enemy' against whom one was fighting⁷⁸ that the SED's approach to rehabilitation fell short on a more serious and sustained level. Admittedly, the language used by Ulbricht in March 1956 in his first official newspaper article responding to Khrushchev's speech indicated that Stalinism was morally, if not politically, dead.⁷⁹ Terror as a weapon in the battle for socialism would no longer be condoned; instead, more subtle techniques of political repression were required. Nonetheless, what Buck-Morss calls the 'concrete, visual field' of a historically ordained struggle against the 'class enemy', waged by the party-state in the name of the broader 'collective' of all East German citizens, continued to dominate the SED's ideological approach and its representational 'positioning' in the Cold War.⁸⁰ Above all, the GDR was cast by its leaders in the late 1950s and 1960s as the 'better Germany' (in contrast to the 'militaristic' FRG), and as a society built by unsullied heroes (in contrast to the 'decadent' west). In their life stories written for the SED archive, rehabilitated party veterans could celebrate their opposition to Social Democrats under the Weimar Republic, their contribution to the war against fascism in Spain in the late 1930s, their fearless resistance to Nazism during Soviet exile and

their triumphant return to the GDR; but they also knew better than to make any connection between German communism and Stalinist terror or to question the SED's beneficence in quietly readmitting them into its ranks. If they accepted censorship at home as a necessary means of battling against internal class enemies and protecting the GDR's all-important relationship with the Soviet Union,⁸¹ publication of critical texts abroad – especially in West Germany – was a step that very few returning victims would take, out of fear of being labelled disloyal. Besides this, should these informal mechanisms of control ever fail, they were backed up by a harsh penal code which made unsanctioned contacts with western publishing houses or human rights groups equivalent to the crime of '*landesverräterische Nachrichtenübermittlung*' (treasonous disclosure of state secrets), carrying with it a possible prison sentence of two to 12 years.⁸²

Only in the years 1988–1990 was the silence that had pervaded this issue for so long gradually and half-heartedly lifted. In stops and starts, and beginning with a hedged statement by the party in June 1988 ahead of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the KPD,⁸³ the East German population was slowly made aware of the truth about the German victims of Stalin and the complete inadequacy of the party's response to Khrushchev's partial revelations in 1956. Part of this was a consequence of pressures on the SED coming from the west, including from the more *perestroika*-friendly West German Communist Party (DKP) and, with greater force and consistency, from Hermann Weber's research centre on the history of the GDR based at the University of Mannheim.⁸⁴ But the main driver of change – as in the years 1953–1956 – was the Soviet Union itself, a fact which was all too quickly forgotten in the anti-communist euphoria that followed German reunification in the early 1990s.

Notes

1. For an early account of the horrors faced by Germans caught up in the 1930s purges see D. Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982). Also useful on the KPD during this period are C. Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 44–99; and C. Jung, *Flucht in den Terror: Das sowjetische Exil in Autobiographien deutscher Kommunisten* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 2008).
2. P. Erler, 'Die Rückführung deutscher Opfer des Stalinismus aus der UdSSR und ihre Eingliederung in das gesellschaftliche Leben der SBZ/DDR: Eine Bestandsaufnahme', in H. Weber and D. Staritz (eds), *Kommunisten verfolgen Kommunisten: Stalinistischer Terror und "Säuberungen" in den kommunistischen Parteien Europas seit den dreißiger Jahren* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 424–35 (here p. 427).

3. See Eberlein's memoirs, *Geboren am 9. November: Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 2000). Eberlein's mother and aunt had already written to Pieck in 1945 and 1946 to ask for his help in getting Eberlein returned to Berlin after 12 years in the Soviet Union, including deportation to Siberia in 1940. See the letters in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin (henceforth SAPMO-BArch), DY 30/IV 2/11/261, Bl. 74–6.
4. W. Leonhard, *Die Revolution entläßt ihre Kinder* (Cologne, 1955), pp. 459–63.
5. On the Seydewitz brothers, see H. Weber, 'Weiße Flecken' in *der Geschichte: Die KPD-Opfer der Stalinschen Säuberungen und ihre Rehabilitierung*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1990 [1989]), p. 104.
6. M. Stark, '"Traten keine Probleme auf...": Zur Rückkehr deutscher politischer ExilantInnen aus der UdSSR', in A. Kaminsky (ed.), *Heimkehr 1948: Geschichte und Schicksale deutscher Kriegsgefangener* (Munich, 1998), pp. 282–98 (here p. 286).
7. M. Stibbe, 'East Germany, 1945–1953: Stalinist Repression and Internal Party Purges', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 57–77.
8. Peter Erler suggests a figure of around 180 repatriated German victims for the entire period from May 1945 to June 1962, of whom about 30 returned before 1948–1949 and the 'vast majority' after 1954. See P. Erler, ' "Mich haben die persönlichen Erlebnisse nicht zum nörgelnden Kleinbürger gemacht": Deutsche GULag-Häftlinge in der DDR', in A. Leo and P. Reif-Spirek (eds), *Vielstimmiges Schweigen: Neue Studien zum DDR-Antifaschismus* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 173–96 (here pp. 173–5). Also Stark, '"Traten keine Probleme auf..."', pp. 285–6.
9. M. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime and the Fate of Reform After Stalin* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), p. 4.
10. S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2000), pp. 11–12, 67 and 107.
11. For a further discussion, see T. Lindenberger, 'Divided But Not Disconnected: Germany as a Border Region of the Cold War', in T. Hochscherf, C. Laucht and A. Plowman (eds), *Divided But Not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War* (New York and Oxford, 2010), pp. 11–33.
12. J. Kuczynski, *Memoiren: Die Erziehung des J.K. zum Kommunisten und Wissenschaftler* (East Berlin and Weimar, 1973), p. 271. Cited in U. Frevert, *The Moral Economy of Trust: Modern Trajectories* (London, 2014), p. 26.
13. On the entangled yet asymmetric relationship between the two German states after 1945, see also C. Kleßmann, 'Verflechtung und Abgrenzung: Aspekte der geteilten und zusammengehörigen deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B29–30 (16 July 1993), pp. 30–41.
14. Cf. L. P. Kopalín, *Die Rehabilitierung deutscher Opfer sowjetischer politischer Verfolgung: Vortrag vor dem Gesprächskreis Geschichte der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* (Bonn, 1995). On the operation of political terror in the early GDR, see also F. Werkentin, *Politische Strafrecht in der Ära Ulbricht: Vom bekennenden Terror zur verdeckten Repression*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1997 [1995]).
15. M. Stibbe, 'The SED, German Communism and the 17 June 1953 Uprising: New Trends and New Research', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 37–55.

16. H. Weber, 'Schauprozess-Vorbereitungen in der DDR', in Weber and Staritz (eds), *Kommunisten verfolgen Kommunisten*, pp. 436–49; G. H. Hodos, *Schauprozesse: Stalinistische Säuberungen in Osteuropa 1948–1954* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 240–72; M. Stibbe, 'Jürgen Kuczynski and the Search for a (Non-existent) Western Spy Ring in the East German Communist Party in 1953', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2011), pp. 61–79.
17. Stibbe, 'East Germany, 1945–1953'. For the period after 1953, see also K. W. Fricke and R. Engelmann, '*Konzentrierte Schläge*': *Staatssicherheitsaktionen und politische Prozesse in der DDR 1953–1956* (Berlin, 1998).
18. Werkentin, *Politische Straffjustiz*, p. 379.
19. Hodos, *Schauprozesse*, p. 270; H. Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, revised ed. (Munich, 2000), p. 192.
20. See the documentary evidence in *Zur Entlassung werden vorgeschlagen ... Wirken und Arbeitsergebnisse der Kommission des Zentralkomitees zur Überprüfung von Angelegenheiten von Parteimitgliedern 1956*, with an introduction by J. Gabert (Berlin, 1991), here esp. pp. 30–1 and 105.
21. *Neues Deutschland*, 28 April 1956. Reproduced in *Zur Entlassung werden vorgeschlagen...*, pp. 31–3.
22. Werkentin, *Politische Straffjustiz*, p. 379.
23. M. Stark, '*Ich muß sagen, wie es war*': *Deutsche Frauen des GULag* (Berlin, 1999), p. 178.
24. On the West German Communist Party, see P. Major, *The Death of the KPD: Communism and Anti-Communism in West Germany, 1945–1956* (Oxford, 1998). On the SEW – in reality the SED in all but name – see T. Klein, *SEW – Die Westberliner Einheitssozialisten: Eine "ostdeutsche Partei" als Stachel im Fleische der Frontstadt?* (Berlin, 2009).
25. See also the revised English translation of Buber-Neumann's book, *Under Two Dictators: Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler*, with an introduction by N. Wachsmann (London, 2008).
26. Erler, 'Die Rückführung', p. 430.
27. Stark, '"Traten keine Probleme auf..."', pp. 289–90.
28. S. Leonhard, *Gestohlenes Leben: Schicksal einer politischen Emigrantin in der Sowjetunion* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1956).
29. Anti-Stalinist groups operating out of West Berlin in the 1950s included the *Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit* (KgU) and the *Untersuchungsausschuß Freiheitlicher Juristen* (UFJ). For further details on both organisations, see Fricke and Engelmann, '*Konzentrierte Schläge*', esp. pp. 80–97, 159–69 and 214–21.
30. C. Morina, 'Instructed Silence, Constructed Memory: The SED and the Return of German Prisoners of War as "War Criminals" from the Soviet Union to East Germany, 1950–1956', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2004), pp. 323–43.
31. Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Vorlage an das Sekretariats des ZK, 7 February 1955, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV 2/11/259, Bl. 4–5.
32. See the nine-page list in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV 2/11/261, Bl. 2–10. Cf. Erler, 'Die Rückführung', pp. 431–2.
33. Protokoll der 122. Sitzung der ZPKK am 21. September 1955. Reproduced in J. Gabert, L. Prieß, P. Erler and J. Finkeisen (eds), *SED und Stalinismus: Dokumente aus dem Jahre 1956* (East Berlin, 1990), pp. 131–2.

34. Protokoll über die erste Sitzung der Kommission des Zentralkomitees zur Überprüfung von Angelegenheiten von Parteimitgliedern vom 19. April 1956. Reproduced in Gabert et al. (eds), *SED und Stalinismus*, p. 133.
35. Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Information über die Rückführung der ehemaligen Politemigranten oder ihrer Angehörigen aus der Sowjetunion in die DDR, 15 October 1956, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV 2/11/261, Bl. 26–8 (here Bl. 26).
36. Beschluß des Zentralkomitees, 1 August 1956, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV 2/11/261, Bl. 24.
37. Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, 15 October 1956 (as note 35 above), Bl. 27.
38. Erler, 'Die Rückführung', p. 431.
39. Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Vorlage an das Sekretariat des Zentralkomitees, 13 October 1956, in SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 2/11/261, Bl. 25.
40. See note 8 above.
41. See the full list in Gabert et al. (eds), *SED und Stalinismus*, pp. 149–75.
42. Erler, "“Mich haben...”", p. 176.
43. W. Ulbricht, 'Über den XX. Parteitag der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion', *Neues Deutschland*, 4 March 1956. Copy in Gabert et al. (eds), *SED und Stalinismus*, pp. 93–115 (here pp. 94–5).
44. Aus dem Referat Walter Ulbrichts auf der 28. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED, 27.–29. Juli 1956. Reproduced in Gabert et al. (eds), *SED und Stalinismus*, p. 146.
45. Ulbricht's written response, dated 7 September 1956, to a declaration made by Fred Oelßner at a Politburo session on 3 July 1956, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/486, Bl. 26–9.
46. J. Granville, 'Ulbricht in October 1956: Survival of the *Spitzbart* during Destalinization', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2006), pp. 477–502. See also M. Frank, *Walter Ulbricht: Eine deutsche Biografie* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 270–83.
47. See N. Steinberger, *Berlin, Moskau, Kolyma und zurück: Ein biographisches Gespräch über Stalinismus und Antisemitismus mit Barbara Broggini* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 103–4. Also Erler, "“Mich haben...”", p. 191.
48. Werkentin, *Politische Straffjustiz*, pp. 351–2 and 379.
49. Stark, "“Traten keine Probleme auf ...”", p. 298.
50. 'Vor 40 Jahren an der Weberwiese: Zum Jahrestag der Gründung der Freien Sozialistischen Jugend', *Neues Deutschland*, 28 October 1958. Copy in SAPMO-BArch, SgY 30/0278, Bl. 32. In September 1920, the FSJ became the KJVD (*Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands* or Young Communist League).
51. 'Vor 40 Jahren an der Weberwiese'. The reference is to the forthcoming elections to the East German parliament, the *Volkskammer*.
52. Gabert et al. (eds), *SED und Stalinismus*, p. 156.
53. 'Martha Globig 60 Jahre', *Neues Deutschland*, 9 July 1961.
54. The memoirs were recorded in two sittings in January and July 1962, and covered her life from her involvement in the young workers' movement in the First World War up to 1943, but remained hidden away in the party archives until 1990. They were subsequently published in U. Plener

- (ed.), *Leben mit Hoffnung in Pein: Frauenschicksale unter Stalin* (Frankfurt/Oder, 1997), pp. 231–79. The original transcript is in SAPMO-BArch, SgY 30/0278. On the *Sektor Erinnerungen* in the Central Party Archive and its role in ‘disciplin[ing] longtime [party] cadres’, see also Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, pp. 134 and 194–7.
55. Erler, ‘Die Rückführung’, p. 433.
56. Buber-Neumann, *Under Two Dictators*, p. xv. Weber, ‘Weiße Flecken’, pp. 30–1, gives a higher estimate of up to 1,000 victims transferred to the Gestapo.
57. Frank, *Walter Ulbricht*, pp. 262–63.
58. Eberlein, *Geboren am 9. November*, p. 316. According to Eberlein, Khrushchev replied: ‘I have no intention of trying to persuade you to publish it in the GDR. I only want to try to explain to you why I thought it right to allow it to appear in the Soviet Union.’
59. Schlusswort Walter Ulbrichts auf der Beratung des Politbüros des ZK der SED und des Präsidiums des Ministerrates mit Schriftstellern und Künstlern, 25. und 26. März 1963, *Neues Deutschland*, 4 April 1963. Cited in Erler, “‘Mich haben ...’”, p. 186.
60. M. Lemke, ‘Instrumentalisierter Antifaschismus und SED-Kampagnepolitik im deutschen Sonderkonflikt 1960–1968’, in J. Danyel (ed.), *Die geteilte Vergangenheit: Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin, 1995), pp. 61–86; A. Weinke, “‘Verteidigen tue ich schon recht gern ...’”: Friedrich Karl Kaul und die westdeutschen NS-Prozesse der 1960er-Jahre’, in KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (ed.), *Schuldig: NS-Verbrechen vor deutschen Gerichten* (Bremen, 2005), pp. 44–57.
61. Grass to Seghers, 14 August 1961. Reproduced in H. Frielinghaus (ed.), *Das Günter Grass Lesebuch* (Munich, 2009), pp. 82–4.
62. P. Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym: The Perpetual Dissident* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 125–7. On fears stirred up by ‘Beat Music’, see also M. Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York and Oxford, 2007), esp. pp. 168–73.
63. On Ottwalt, see Weber, ‘Weiße Flecken’, p. 88; Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 116; and Pike, *German Writers*, pp. 215, 317 and 347.
64. It was published in German in 2000 and in the English original in 2006. See P. Hutchinson’s foreword to S. Heym, *The Architects* (Evanston, IL, 2006 [2000]), pp. v–xii (here p. xii).
65. Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 236, n. 12.
66. Kurt Hager to members and candidate members of the SED Politburo, 9 December 1964, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/ J IV 2/2J 1599.
67. Phrase used by Heym in *The Architects*, p. 201.
68. Text of speech by Stefan Heym to the East German Writers’ Association, Berlin, 4 December 1964, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/ J IV 2/2J 1599. See also the discussion in Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, pp. 119–21.
69. E. Honecker, Bericht an das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED, 16–18 December 1965. Reproduced in C. Kleßmann (ed.), *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation: Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970* (Göttingen, 1988), pp. 576–8.
70. Hutchinson, foreword to *The Architects*, pp. x–xi. Havemann suffered even worse persecution, being dismissed from all his party and academic posts in 1964–1965, and spending part of the 1970s under virtual house arrest. His son Florian was imprisoned in 1968 in connection with protests against the

invasion of Czechoslovakia, and later got out to West Germany. Biermann faced increasing difficulties in getting his works published or performed in the East, and was formally expelled from the GDR in 1976 while on a trip to Cologne.

71. On Ruge, see M. Keßler, *Exilerfahrung in Wissenschaft und Politik: Reemigrierte Historiker in der frühen DDR* (Cologne, 2001), pp. 301–10 (here esp. p. 306). See also the best-selling novel by Ruge's son – E. Ruge, *In Times of Fading Light: The Story of a Family*, trans. by A. Bell (London, 2013 [2011]).
72. Erler, "“Mich haben...”", p. 185.
73. See also Jung, *Flucht in den Terror*.
74. Frank, *Walter Ulbricht*, pp. 64–5.
75. Weber, 'Weiße Flecken', p. 101.
76. Lebensbericht der Genossin Adele Schiffmann, March 1988, pp. 22–3. Copy in SAPMO-BArch, SgY 2199.
77. Erler, "“Mich haben...”", pp. 179–80.
78. Dobson, *Khruschchev's Cold Summer*, p. 3.
79. See note 43 above.
80. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, p. 12.
81. In 1963, the rehabilitated returnee Mimi Brichmann, whose own husband had perished in the Soviet purges, wrote a negative report on Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich* for her employer, the Berlin-based Verlag Kultur und Fortschritt, in which she recommended against publication on the grounds that 'if one were to present this now to the German people ... it would only lead to an alienation [*Abkehr*] from the Soviet Union' – cited in Stark, 'Ich muß sagen, wie es war', p. 238.
82. M. Weyrauch, "“Zuerst geht es um die Opfer des Unrechts, nicht um die Täter und die Rache an ihnen...”": Zur Erarbeitung eines Rehabilitierungsgesetzes in der DDR', in R. Eckert, A. von Plato and J. Schütrumpf (eds), *Wendezeiten – Zeitenwände: Zur 'Entnazifizierung' und 'Entstalinisierung'* (Hamburg, 1991), pp. 111–16 (here p. 112).
83. Weber, 'Weiße Flecken', pp. 51–5.
84. K.-H. Janßen, 'Stalins KPD-Opfer', *Die Zeit*, 13 April 1990. See also H. Weber and G. Weber, *Leben nach dem 'Prinzip Links': Erinnerungen an fünf Jahrzehnten* (Berlin, 2006), esp. pp. 350–7. The DKP was formed in West Germany in 1968, overturning the previous ban on the KPD in 1956.

6

The Rehabilitation Process in Czechoslovakia: Party and Popular Responses

Kevin McDermott and Klára Pinerová

The release and rehabilitation of political prisoners in Czechoslovakia occurred in a staggered and long drawn-out process beginning in the mid-1950s and culminating only after the collapse of the communist state in 1989–1990. Following Stalin's death and the first tentative steps towards de-Stalinisation in the USSR, a few high-ranking Czechoslovak communist prisoners were released and several official party commissions were established to examine the trials and purges of the years 1948–1954; however, only the last, operating in the liberalised atmosphere of 1968, gave a reasonably comprehensive and accurate account of Stalinist repression. Following the crushing of the Prague Spring reforms in 1968, rehabilitation became a victim of the pro-Soviet 'normalisation' regime. In addition to the party reviews, general amnesties were passed in 1953, 1955, 1957, 1960, 1962 and 1965, the main one of which was the 9 May 1960 presidential decree which freed (albeit conditionally) over 5,000 political prisoners. This chapter, which is based primarily on materials in the Communist Party and Security Services archives, has two broad aims. First, to analyse how and why the Czechoslovak party leaders sought to limit and control the challenges of de-Stalinisation and political rehabilitation via party commissions and amnesties; and second, to explore a crucial issue that has been largely overlooked in existing historiography – the reaction of the party rank-and-file membership and citizenry to the release of political internees, the attitudes of the returnees themselves and the implications of these responses for state-society relations. To what extent was party discipline undermined by the revelations of Stalinist crimes? How far did the reactions of 'ordinary' citizens and the returnees pose a threat to the regime? What were the repercussions of rehabilitation for the fraught Czech–Slovak relationship? Or,

conversely, is there evidence that Czechs and Slovaks were broadly supportive of the amnesties? Was the state-society nexus strengthened in any way by the rehabilitation process?

Historical context

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa* – KSČ) seized power in a bloodless semi-constitutional coup in late February 1948. Thereafter, the immediate political goal for the communists was to consolidate and extend their monopoly of power, and state-sponsored terror was a prime method in this quest. In the following months and years, persecution affected all classes and strata of society: communists, non-communists and anti-communists, Czechs and Slovaks, young and old, men and women, blue- and white-collar workers, farmers, intellectuals, students, religious orders and the military. Numerically, it is still impossible to arrive at precise overall figures of victims, as the term ‘repression’ covers a wide variety of meanings and measures: non-judicial murder, judicial execution, detention in labour camps or prison, enforced military service, expulsion from the party, loss of employment and status, and a host of other social and material restrictions including evictions from dwellings, exclusions from schools and universities, arbitrary reduction or cessation of pension payments and confiscation of personal property. Regardless of these perennial uncertainties, archival findings indicate that just under 90,000 citizens were prosecuted for ‘political crimes’ in the years 1948–1954, over 22,000 were incarcerated in 107 labour camps or ‘units’ (*pracovní útvary*), around 60,000 suspect soldiers, conscripts and others were condemned to back-breaking work in special construction battalions, and as many as 1,157 people perished in detention.¹

It is also widely agreed that between October 1948 and December 1952, 233 death penalties were pronounced, of which 178 were carried out. More death penalties were approved in 1953 and 1954, a total of 181 being passed between 1953 and 1960, although this number includes ‘ordinary’ criminals. Tens of others were shot while trying to escape from prison or attempting to flee the borders. Among the communist elite, 278 high-ranking party functionaries were convicted, but it must be noted that communist victims represented a tiny fraction of the total sentenced (some have estimated a mere 0.1 per cent). The most notorious show trial was that of the former KSČ General Secretary, Rudolf Slánský, and 13 co-defendants, most of whom were Jewish. Eleven were sentenced to death and three received life in prison. In

addition, purges and expulsions reduced the size of the party by several hundred thousand in the years 1949–1954.²

The legacy of Stalinist terror in Czechoslovakia was far-reaching. At a very profound level, the political trials 'were a manifestation of inhumanity that shook socialism to its foundations both in Czechoslovakia and abroad. The effects were felt in all areas: economic, political and cultural, in the minds of the people, in relations between citizens and in the country's international standing.'³ To take just one example: in political and everyday life, the numerous violations of the law and the constant search for the 'enemy within' bred mistrust and suspicion, engendered widespread feelings of fear and legal insecurity in the population, and undermined public faith in the constitution and politics in general. In many ways, then, the persecutions and purges of the period 1948–1954 lay at the root of the social crises that culminated in the Prague Spring of 1968. But even the convulsive and painful re-evaluations of the past associated with Alexander Dubček's 'socialism with a human face' did not adequately fulfil the demands for rehabilitation and justice on the part of the unjustly condemned. Indeed, the wounds are still apparent to this day – an ugly and unwanted reminder of a dark past which implicated and tainted too many people.

The party elite and rehabilitation

The complex rehabilitation process in communist Czechoslovakia unfolded in three inter-linked phases. The initial phase occurred in the mid-1950s following Stalin's death in March 1953. The KSČ belatedly responded to this cataclysmic event by establishing a party commission to review the cases against leading communists. This investigation was boosted by Nikita Khrushchev's famous 'secret speech' in February 1956 at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, in which he audaciously attacked Stalin's 'cult of personality'. The second phase began in the early 1960s, after Khrushchev's renewed 'de-Stalinisation' drive in 1961–1962, and culminated in two other inconclusive party revisions of the trials. The final and most dramatic phase is closely associated with the reforms of the Prague Spring, which were curtailed by the Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968. These official party reviews were punctuated by a series of presidential amnesties which cumulatively saw the release of many thousands of people, including 'ordinary' criminals as well as communist and non-communist political prisoners. We shall discuss these three waves of rehabilitation before assessing popular reactions to the liberation and return of Stalinist victims.

Stalin's demise and Khrushchev's sensational 'secret speech' ushered in an uneven rehabilitation process in the USSR and across communist Eastern Europe. It is fair to say that the Czechoslovak party was not at the forefront of these momentous revisions. The main reason for this stubborn recalcitrance was the fact that the incumbent leaders in the mid-1950s – men such as party boss Antonín Novotný, President Antonín Zápotocký, Prime Minister Viliam Široký and Slovak party leader Karol Bacílek – were intimately connected with the Stalinist repressions. They were fully cognisant of the illegal methods used by the security services to extract confessions from the accused and, thus, were fearful that their own positions, and that of the regime as a whole, would be seriously threatened by unearthing the crimes of the recent past. Nevertheless, under pressure from Moscow and events in neighbouring Hungary and Poland, and in response to internal complaints and demands for redress, they reluctantly decided to inaugurate a partial review of the trials and to release a number of prisoners, initially several fairly high-ranking communist victims. The first concrete step in this process was the presidential amnesty of 4 May 1953, under the terms of which 13,018 persons were pardoned and released from prison, most of whom were judicially convicted criminals. This substantially reduced the total number of prisoners, from 46,021 in 1953 to 31,840 in 1954.⁴

The 1953 amnesty was followed by the establishment on 10 January 1955 of the first of the party committees into the political trials, euphemistically known in official parlance as 'distortions of socialist legality'. The commission took the name of its chair, Rudolf Barák, the Minister of the Interior. According to Novotný, the commission's specific and strictly limited task was to examine 'some of the post-1948 court cases with reference to the sentences' of certain leading communists: the mass repression of non-communists was expressly excluded from its purview, as was, at first, the incendiary Slánský trial. Hence, the Barák Commission, which operated until the autumn of 1957, was 'not concerned with rehabilitation, or with endeavouring ... to probe the violations of the law and their causes; [its] chief consideration was to salve the conscience of the Politburo by putting a political full stop to the matter'.⁵ Given the immense sensitivity of the issue, the whole undertaking was carried out *in camera*, perpetuating the custom of working behind closed doors, and even eminent party functionaries, let alone the Czechoslovak public, were unaware of the commission's existence. The main problem was that the inquiry remained at all times under the tight political subordination of the Stalinised KSČ Politburo, and all

results were subject to its approval. Neither did the composition of the commission inspire confidence – the majority of members, including Barák, were heavily involved in the depredations of the Stalinist era.

For all these reasons, the commission's reports and recommendations were tentative in the extreme. Of the 300 cases examined, only in 52 were the original sentences reduced. In addition, in 1955 and 1956 a few individuals were conditionally released for good behaviour, the most noteworthy being Artur London and Vavro Hajdů, who were defendants in the Slánský trial, and Josef Smrkovský, who was to play a highly influential role in the Prague Spring. However, thesefortunates were not politically or socially rehabilitated.⁶ Other prominent victims like Gustáv Husák, a leading Slovak communist tried and sentenced in 1954, and Evžen Löbl, another of the Slánský 'conspirators', were left languishing in jail until 1960. Rather than implicate the current party leaders in the illegalities, the Barák Commission transferred the blame to the state security apparatus. Notoriously thuggish investigators, such as Bohumil Doubek and Vladimír Kohoutek, were arrested, though given very lenient sentences and soon reprieved. Crucially, Slánský was construed as the 'Czechoslovak Beria', Stalin's secret police henchman, and held accountable for creating the entire security machine that had mushroomed out of control in the early 1950s. In this crass manner, the party executives attempted to reassign responsibility for the lawlessness and wash their hands of the matter.

Partial revision and official obfuscation, however, could not erase the history of the political purges from public consciousness. It was a veritable Pandora's box which party leaders ignored at their peril. In the mid-to-late 1950s, more and more people sentenced in the show trials demanded a re-examination of their cases as the first step to full judicial and party rehabilitation.⁷ Many lower-level KSČ activists and rank-and-file members also pushed for meaningful explanations and actions from their superiors. This up-swell of disquiet 'from below' placed the party elite in a profound quandary, and as a preventive measure they decided to resort to amnesties as the preferred method of redress. For the victims this represented a compromise 'solution', because although they might be released under the terms of any amnesty, they were not legally exonerated of their 'crimes'. Amnesty definitely did not equal rehabilitation, and this was precisely its attraction for the party leadership. Hence, the election of Novotný as the new President of the republic served as the occasion for the November 1957 amnesty, as a result of which 4,811 people – mainly 'ordinary' criminals – were released from prison.⁸ This was followed by a more expansive presidential amnesty on 9 May 1960,

which was announced as part of the celebrations of the 15th anniversary of the country's liberation by the Red Army and as a marker of the 'triumph of socialism' in Czechoslovakia. This amnesty was particularly important for political prisoners.

Pressure for action did not just come from within. Novotný may have been able to partly circumvent domestic opinion and the accumulation of new evidence about the 'inconsistencies' of the Barák Commission, but he found it harder to ignore Moscow. Khrushchev's renewed drive to expose the excesses of Stalinism at the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961 placed the Czechoslovak leaders in yet another dilemma. Despite initial prevarication and insistence on the guilt of most of the leading communist victims, Novotný was eventually compelled to return to the explosive issue of the Stalinist trials and repressions. In September 1962, the Kolder Commission, named after its chair Presidium member Drahomír Kolder, was established. Its task was to reinvestigate the main trials of 1948–1954 and to make 'recommendations' to the party's Central Committee. This time, importantly, the Slánský case was to be reviewed, but again, as in the Barák Commission, revision of the trials of non-communists was omitted from Kolder's brief. His report and recommendations, ratified by the Presidium in April 1963, were more forthright and far-reaching than those of 1955–1957, no doubt reflecting the perceived need for accelerated 'de-Stalinisation' and indicative of Novotný's relatively secure power position, having removed his prime rival, Barák, from the leadership the previous year.

Thus, Kolder's report 'described the main trials as fabrications and completed the judicial rehabilitation of all the condemned', Slánský included.⁹ These individuals, if alive, were to be compensated for the harm suffered, and party, police and judicial officials involved in the illegalities were subject to party penalties and punishment. In the event, by 1964 this affected 47 persons in state security and 58 in the Ministry of the Interior. Breaches of 'socialist legality' were blamed on Klement Gottwald and other party leaders, a few of whom were forced to leave their positions to be replaced by younger reform-oriented and less dogmatic politicians, such as Dubček, who succeeded the Stalinist Bacílek as Slovak party boss. Moreover, between April 1963 and the end of 1967, over 380 members were reinstated in the party and all received financial compensation and reasonable accommodation. However, regardless of these hopeful signs, the Kolder Commission's report, which was not revealed to the public, still left many stones unturned. Full party rehabilitation was not extended to Slánský and five other prominent trial victims, whose expulsion from the party was reconfirmed. They

were still treated as guilty of serious political and ideological 'crimes'. Those released and exonerated were not permitted to take up responsible posts, and many remained uncompensated and deeply resentful. Neither did the report point any fingers at Novotný for his role in the repressions, which is hardly surprising given his personal interventions in the commission's activities.¹⁰

Specific conditions existed in Slovakia. The strained relations between Czechs and Slovaks, going back to the inter-war First Republic, the Munich agreement and wartime territorial division, had their corollary in the KSČ. Novotný was well known for his less than positive attitude towards Slovakia, and for many Slovaks (communists included), his personal stance epitomised a more general Czech condescension and arrogance. Nationalist sentiment was further exacerbated by the asymmetrical power arrangements in the state which Slovaks justifiably regarded as 'Pragocentric' and overly centralised. These embedded tensions and conflicts were made potentially dangerous by the trial and conviction of several leading Slovak communists in April 1954 on the spurious, ideologically loaded and inflammatory charge of 'bourgeois nationalism'. Husák, a trained lawyer and respected figure, was the prime defendant and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Despite his unlawful incarceration, Husák remained a committed communist – indeed he was to be the party's First Secretary from April 1969 to December 1987. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Husák steadfastly maintained his innocence, bombarding the authorities with letters and petitions demanding his release and rehabilitation. The former was granted in the presidential amnesty of May 1960, but the Novotný leadership studiously refused to consider the latter until June 1963 when, in the wake of the Kolder report and with the Husák case becoming a burning and emotional national issue in Slovakia, the party set up the so-called 'Barnabite Commission' to investigate the accusation of 'bourgeois nationalism'. Its conclusions were unexpected. The charge of 'bourgeois nationalism' was found to have no justification, full party rehabilitation was bestowed on Husák and his co-defendants in December 1963 and, partly as a consequence of the commission's fact-finding efforts, the despised Slovak 'centralist', Široký, was removed as Prime Minister. The report remained silent, however, on pressing broader problems such as Slovakia's perceived second-class economic, political and constitutional status.¹¹

Ultimately, the three party review committees in 1955–1957 (Barák) and 1962–1963 (Kolder and 'Barnabite') were all unsatisfactory compromise affairs designed to limit the impact of rehabilitation on the

reputation of the incumbent leaders, notably Novotný, and of the KSC and regime as a whole. But in our opinion, cynical opportunism, careerism, guilt and deep-rooted fear were not the only factors that constrained the commissions' work. It would appear that many communists, particularly in the elite, genuinely believed in the guilt (or at least complicity) of some of the main victims of Stalinist terror. It was almost impossible for diehard militants to admit that the party – the repository of 'historical truth', progress and enlightenment – had *got things wrong*. This ideologically conditioned, essentially 'Stalinist', mentality played a crucial role in hindering a full and open *post-mortem* on the crimes of the 1948–1954 period. Hence, it was precisely during the reformist and democratising, though short-lived, Prague Spring from January to August 1968 that the rehabilitation process entered a qualitatively different, more civilised, stage. The party Action Programme, ratified in early April 1968, gave the public a clear foretaste of the new spirit:

The Party realizes that people unlawfully condemned and persecuted cannot regain the lost years of their life. It will, however, do its best to remove any shadow of the mistrust and humiliation to which families and relatives of those affected were often subjected, and will resolutely ensure that such persecuted people have every opportunity of showing their worth in work, in public life, and in political activities.¹²

To this end, a law on judicial rehabilitation (No. 82/1968) was passed almost unanimously by the National Assembly on 25 June 1968. It has been described as 'a humane step, rare in history, and *unique in the communist world*, to restore justice to the victims of illegalities of an entire historical period'. It was proposed to re-examine the cases of up to 100,000 individuals unjustly sentenced in the years 1948 to 1965, to offer financial compensation to *bona fide* victims to a maximum of 20,000 crowns per annum, and to permit, in certain circumstances, the criminal punishment of those guilty of illegal actions in the security and judicial services and in the relevant ministries.¹³ For the first time, judicial and social rehabilitation was to be extended to tens of thousands of non-communists, not just leading communists. However, the law did not fully satisfy everyone. Some organisations, like the newly formed K-231, a large grouping of vocal ex-political prisoners, and the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, forcefully promoted the idea of a *universal* rehabilitation to include all those convicted of politically motivated 'crimes', to annul all sentences of the political trials and to compensate

all victims.¹⁴ Communist bosses, even the most reformist, could not accept this sweeping demand, and in the event, the law exempted from rehabilitation those individuals who had been justly convicted of violating valid laws, such as those who distributed anti-communist leaflets or helped people to flee the state borders into West Germany or Austria. It was considered that these and other prosecutions were 'derived from the historically justified class character of the legislation of the socialist revolution'.¹⁵

In tandem with the rehabilitation law, in April 1968 the Dubček leadership created a fourth party review committee – the Piller Commission – to re-investigate the major political trials of the early 1950s, including that of Slánský and his accomplices, who were finally declared innocent victims and granted full party rehabilitation and exoneration. The commission's exhaustive findings never saw the light of day in communist Czechoslovakia, as they fell foul of the Soviet-led military invasion in August 1968, but an abbreviated version did appear in English translation in 1971. Unlike its predecessors, the Piller report provided a comprehensive interpretation of the causes of Stalinist repression. It assigned prime responsibility to Klement Gottwald, KSČ chairman throughout the years of terror, and other high-ranking party officials, mentioning the now disgraced Novotný by name, and controversially discussed the often determining role played by Soviet advisers. The report concluded that 'an instrument of power had come into being, accountable to no one, beyond all control and outside the law; it had placed itself above society and usurped a power to which it had no right. Its very existence was unconstitutional.'¹⁶ The tragedy is that such fine words doubtless came many years too late for the victims of this monopolistic 'instrument of power'.

Given the corrosive nature of the revitalised rehabilitation process in 1968, it is surprising that it was not immediately derailed by the Warsaw Pact invasion. In the year following the occupation, 23,306 proposals for review were submitted by citizen-victims and the General Prosecutor's Office (GPO) received approximately 7,000 complaints about violations of the law under the Stalinist regime. However, over the coming months, the situation gradually hardened: K-231 was effectively banned, 'reformist' leaders in the GPO, Supreme Court and the Ministries of Justice and the Interior were purged, and the new 'normalising' party authorities, paradoxically soon to be headed by one of the main Stalinist victims, Husák, began to reject rehabilitation requests.¹⁷ But worse was to come. In July 1970, the law on judicial rehabilitation (No. 70/1970) was passed, which seriously complicated rehabilitation

procedures: some former political prisoners were compelled to withdraw their applications, and those who insisted on taking their cases to court had virtually no chance of the decision going in their favour. To add insult to injury, the applicant often had to pay full court costs. What is more, several citizens who had been rehabilitated in 1968–1969 had their decisions rescinded and were forced to return the compensation they had been granted.¹⁸ In a few instances, such as that of Oto Mádr, a Roman Catholic priest whose conviction as a ‘Vatican spy’ in 1951 had been judicially annulled in 1969, cases were reopened. Mádr and his original co-defendants were retried in 1973 and sentenced to prison once again!¹⁹ The fifth, and final, party review committee was established in April 1971, chaired by the arch-‘normaliser’, Josef Kempný. It flatly rejected the conclusions of the Piller report and basically turned the clock back to the conceptions of the Kolder Commission of 1963.²⁰

Ultimate closure for ex-political prisoners had to wait until the collapse of the communist regime in late 1989. In April 1990, the Federal Assembly ratified Act No. 119/1990, under which judicial sentences from the Stalinist period and beyond were cancelled across the board, and virtually all political prisoners were fully rehabilitated. The Czechoslovak state also agreed to compensate victims for time spent in detention and prison, and to facilitate the return of confiscated properties.²¹ Most interesting, however, is the recent reconfiguration in the Czech Republic of the historical role of political prisoners. There has been an evident shift in their public and self-image from ‘victims’ to that of ‘anti-communist fighters’,²² and this politicisation of history and search for ‘heroes’ who opposed the ‘totalitarian’ behemoth was reflected in Law No. 262/2011 from July 2011, which awarded proven ‘participants’ in the resistance against communism a one-off payment of 100,000 Czech crowns (about £2,700).

The May 1960 amnesty: party and popular opinion

The question of how the party and public responded to the various investigations, partial rehabilitations and amnesties from the mid-1950s onwards is highly significant. The rehabilitation process as a whole represented a distinct double-edged sword for the communist authorities. On the one hand, it was a palpable risk for the conservative Novotný party leadership, creating turmoil, doubt and heretical ideas in the heads of lower-level functionaries and members. Indeed, the partial exposure of the brutalities of the not-so-distant Stalinist past played a crucial role in galvanising the search among party liberalisers and

intellectuals for a more humane form of socialism, which culminated in Novotný's ouster and the subsequent reforms of the Prague Spring. The longing for the return of legal norms and an end to arbitrary rule did much to bind the majority of citizens to the largely intellectual reformist movement. But on the other hand, there is evidence that sections of the rank-and-file and, more importantly, non-party citizenry at times identified with the goals and ideological suppositions of the regime. This dichotomy is confirmed by documents in the KSČ and Security Service archives on party moods and social attitudes. We start from the premise that popular sentiment towards the Czechoslovak state in the post-1948 period was rarely based on mega-narratives such as 'democracy versus totalitarianism', 'capitalism versus communism' or 'freedom versus oppression', though these concepts and binaries are not absent in the sources we have consulted.²³ Popular views were more often formed and re-formed in response to a plethora of daily events, decrees and actions, some of which were not directly political, and on which there was a measure of common ground between state and society. The presidential amnesty of May 1960 is a case in point. Although the party and police archives contain many examples of 'opposition' to the regime, they also demonstrate that citizens shared certain values and beliefs with the authorities, sometimes based on class perspectives, localised issues and personality clashes, and sometimes on illiberal, even authoritarian impulses.

Ostensibly, top secret KSČ reports on responses to the piecemeal revisions and selective release of prisoners reflected the disciplined and supportive stance of party functionaries and activists. But a closer reading reveals that an ideological and political can of worms had been opened. Already in the spring of 1956, in the wake of Khrushchev's 'secret speech', a whirlpool of doubts, vacillations and anger was undermining the credibility of the KSČ hierarchy. Lower-level party officials and rank-and-file members began asking many highly sensitive questions: 'how should party members explain the violently forced confessions of the Slánský band?' and 'what will happen to those who broke socialist legality' in Czechoslovakia by carrying out 'Gestapo methods'?²⁴ One reply was that they 'should be publicly exposed and punished'. Others demanded: 'who is culpable for the tyranny?' and seemed to point the finger at Novotný and Bacílek, 'who were the main accusers in the Slánský trial'.²⁵ One party stalwart intoned: 'today I cannot trust the CC [Central Committee] ... there is chaos in the heads of communists.'²⁶ Similar remarks were even made by employees and researchers in the KSČ's Institute of History, a showcase propaganda organisation.²⁷

The new requirement for an objective 'truth' struck at the very heart of the party's claim to a monopoly of knowledge and doctrinal purity, and hence must have been considered a dangerous heresy.

The 'answers' provided by the leadership to these unwelcome queries were clearly inadequate, as seven years later, in April 1963 at the time of the Kolder report, the same issues were again troubling district officials and the rank-and-file: 'How was it possible to commit such gross errors and breaches of socialist legality.... Did the party leaders really not know of the incorrect investigation methods of the security organs?' What role did the present members of the Central Committee play in the early 1950s and have they performed real self-criticism? Some speakers linked the 'cult of personality' and lack of inner-party democracy with contemporary economic problems in the country, and called for broader improvements in KSC policy.²⁸ Among many party activists, especially veterans, their long-standing commitment to Marxism-Leninism was shaken and they were forced to question the integrity of the Security Services, the 'shield of the revolution'. All in all, party reactions in 1956 and 1963, especially at the district and municipal levels, were often critical of the bosses and the 'cult of personality' that surrounded them. Some even contended that 'a class struggle exists today in the party. On the one side are the ordinary [*prostí*] workers, and on the other the top functionaries, the so-called red aristocracy.'²⁹ In this atmosphere, the KSC elite had a tough time ensuring Leninist discipline in its ranks, which, together with other evidence from the 1950s and 1960s, suggests that the party was far from a monolithically united body. The plurality of views and relative breakdown of authority in the party challenges the still influential concept of 'totalitarianism', with its explicit emphasis on effective control 'from above', and fierce centralisation and implicit assumptions of a passive and cowed membership.

Indicative of the subterranean turmoil in the KSC, especially among the cultural intelligentsia, was the ongoing Czech-Slovak imbroglio. In 1964, the Security Services drew up a top secret 'Information Report on the Situation in Slovakia', which surveyed reactions to the rehabilitation of Husák and the other so-called 'Slovak bourgeois nationalists'. The document painted an alarming picture of Slovak political life. Like all official files, great care is required in assessing its provenance and content, but the report strikes a chord in its depiction of Slovak nationalist sentiment. It stated that the Slovak intelligentsia, writers and other 'cultural workers' positively evaluated the rehabilitation of Husák and the 'bourgeois nationalists', supported their activities in the 1940s and 1950s, and viewed their rehabilitation as a starting point for broader

political changes. There were also demands for Husák's return to responsible political functions in the Slovak Communist Party. But more disconcerting for the leadership in Prague were the suggestions that the entire Czech-Slovak relationship needed to be re-examined, that there was 'broad support' for Slovak national emancipation and that Slovakia faced a renewal of religious life and church activity.³⁰

Indeed, a federal solution was a long-standing goal of many Slovaks and was forcefully reiterated by the prominent historian Miloš Gosiorovský, whose pro-federalism memorandum of March 1963 heavily influenced leading Slovak political and intellectual circles.³¹ Profoundly angered, Novotný responded by delivering an offensive anti-Slovak speech in the city of Košice in June, which did much to inflame passions. What is more, it appears that some Czechs equated Slovak proposals for a democratisation of mutual relations as a form of separatism – 'the Slovaks wanted to break away' (*Slováci se chtěli odtrhnout*).³² The point is that these 'nationalist' aspirations did not remain confined to a small band of educated Slovak intellectuals in and outside the party; they resonated with many 'ordinary' KSČ members and citizens. To this extent, the fear of the central authorities was that the release and full rehabilitation of the 'bourgeois nationalists' would boost notions of federalism, strain Czech-Slovak relations and represent, no less, a potential threat to the integrity and unity of the state. Certainly, the Czechoslovak secret police (*Státní bezpečnost* – StB) went to great lengths to monitor the activities of the former members of the wartime Slovak nationalist party and the perceived remnants of its armed wing, the Hlinka Guard.

A case study of the presidential amnesty of May 1960 also reveals that the regime had good cause for concern over the release of so many internees. Under the terms of the amnesty, 7,168 inmates were freed from detention, of whom 5,677 were political prisoners.³³ According to the Deputy Minister of the Interior, over 3,800 were workers, farmers and 'working members' of the bourgeoisie, 2,620 were *kulaks* and other 'bourgeois', and around 650 were 'anti-social parasitic elements'.³⁴ Returnees were effectively on probation, debarred from public life and often denied appropriate employment, most being assigned menial jobs. When they were liberated they had to sign a document saying they would never speak about their experiences in prison or camp, although some did. Hence, in the opinion of one Czech specialist, the presidential decree created 'a new category of "former persons" – the so-called "amnestants"'.³⁵ The bulky Security Service reports on these amnestants clearly indicate that although the communist leaders

had decided to set free several thousand Stalinist victims, they still regarded them as 'enemies' whose activities had to be closely followed.³⁶ Indeed, 'the amnesty was officially considered a mere "interruption" of sentence, which was suspended provided that, usually for ten years, no other conviction for a "premeditated criminal act" came up'.³⁷ The StB motto appeared to be: 'once an enemy, always an enemy', a tacit recognition that the years of detention had failed to 're-educate' the prisoner.

In particular, the security services were highly suspicious of the attempts by returnees to restore their social and political relationships, both at home and abroad; these acts were perceived as attempts to organise 'anti-state' cabals. Police files are replete with reports that ex-prisoners were engaged in 'hostile activities', especially former priests in Slovakia, stigmatised as 'reactionary Catholic fanatics', banned sectarians such as Jehovah's Witnesses, and ex-members of non-communist opposition parties.³⁸ These 'enemy groups', it can be assumed, were more often than not a few individuals reminiscing over a couple of beers, but according to one expert, released prisoners did organise 'regular secret meetings' in order to maintain friendships and express their political solidarity.³⁹ StB apprehensions were perhaps not entirely imaginary, although it should be noted that far from all returnees voiced undying opposition to the regime. Some intimated that they would work hard after release and would never again get involved in 'anti-state activity'. Others remarked on the social and economic achievements made in the country since their arrest and incarceration. Remarkably, several ex-prisoners spoke positively about their experiences in the camps, saying that they had been well treated and fed. One allegedly commented on his 'carefree life' in prison, and several others, who had office jobs in the camps, wished to return there to avoid hard manual or agricultural work. It was even reported that some earned more in the terrible Jáchymov uranium mines than in free labour after release. Many, on the other hand, were ill and broken and just wished to be left in peace with their families, showing no interest in political affairs whatsoever.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the police found plenty of reasons to be vigilant. They were concerned about the returnees' negative attitudes towards the work placements they had been assigned, which were generally unskilled manual or agricultural labour; they were fearful that ex-prisoners would disseminate information about the dire conditions in the labour camps and, ultimately, that their anti-regime sentiments might infect local communities and even provoke a political 'reversal' (*zvrát*). For example, it was reported that one 'amnestant', Josef Maršálek, 'hates the present regime and will hate it till he dies', while another insisted

that 'it is an authoritarian regime in which people cannot decide their own fate'. Imrich Karvaš complained that he had 'lost his sight in a concentration camp' after being 'beaten about the head' and sustaining 'a broken skull'.⁴¹ The Security Services were likewise extremely anxious that ex-prisoners would flee the borders illegally and within 10 weeks of the amnesty 50 had been re-arrested for such attempts or for 'incitement against the republic'.⁴² An official police report into the popular reception of the May 1960 amnesty summed up the authorities' concerns: 'vacillating elements' among the released believed a 'reversal' was possible in the near future not only in Czechoslovakia, but also in other socialist states including the USSR. They pointed to 'imaginary disagreements in the highest ranks of the [Soviet] party and government' and the 'supposed military superiority of the West', and thus aimed to break the 'moral unity of the workers and their faith in the government'. They were spreading the 'slandorous broadcasts of foreign radio stations', like Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, and 'operate[d] a system of passive resistance', assisted by 'reactionary' sectors of society.⁴³ 'The typical view of the amnestied was distrust and an overwhelmingly hostile attitude towards our [socialist] order.'⁴⁴

Popular perceptions of the amnesty, as depicted in the Security Services archive, also gave the authorities cause for disquiet. Most citizens were made aware of the amnesty by announcements in the party daily *Rudé právo* ('Red Right') and the trade union newspaper *Práce* ('Labour'), which represented the amnesty as a manifestation of 'socialist humanism', a sign of the moral strength and political vitality of the system.⁴⁵ Although some seem to have regarded it in this official light, people of 'bourgeois origin' were said to 'trivialise' the guilt of the returnees, churches provocatively offered thanksgiving services, and believers considered the amnesty 'an act influenced by God' and saw no positive part played by the state. The remnant Sudeten-German minority took advantage of the concession to push for improvements in their conditions and there were several reports of 'reactionary doctors' writing supposedly false certificates for amnestied prisoners, freeing them from unsuitable work.⁴⁶ In some communities, especially in the rural areas of south Moravia, returnees were 'heartily greeted by persons with negative attitudes' to the regime.⁴⁷ There were many acts of individual kindness and understanding shown to destitute amnestants; one female returnee, Květoslava Moravečková, recalled how a sympathetic shopkeeper would occasionally give her food for free, which made a real difference to a poor family, while others in her village behaved towards her as if she were still a criminal.⁴⁸ It was not uncommon for citizens to

write to relatives and friends abroad saying they should 'come home' under the terms of the amnesty. The result was that a total of 127 people returned to Czechoslovakia from capitalist states, raising suspicions among the ever-vigilant secret police that former émigré 'spies' had found their way back into the country.⁴⁹ To this extent, the amnesty had potentially dangerous implications, and citizens' responses to it were unpredictable and uncontrollable.

However, despite the problematic unintended outcomes of the amnesty, the archival sources do not permit us to conclude, as convention would have it, that the majority of Czechoslovaks were unequivocally opposed to the regime, or were budding 'dissidents'. The contours of popular opinion were far more complex than the stark binary opposites of 'for' or 'against' the system. Our research on social responses to the Czechoslovak communist regime in the 1950s and early 1960s strongly suggests that there existed certain common bonds, or 'bridges', linking state and society, and that the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' were not always as sharp as some scholars have insisted.⁵⁰ We contend that the best way to conceive of citizens' reactions to the regime is one of 'critical loyalty'. It is a notion closely related to that of 'grudging loyalty' or 'loyal reluctance' (*loyale Widerwilligkeit*) put forward by East German and Third Reich specialists, but these notions seem to us to be rather restrictive in their assumption of a basic unwillingness or reticence on the part of citizens, as if their 'loyalty' had been wrung out of them.⁵¹ 'Critical loyalty', by comparison, offers the perspective of both positive and negative criticism, constructive, subversive and intermediate stances, and hence denotes more open-ended social attitudes towards the political authorities.

We have identified two main overlapping 'bridges' of 'tacit consensus' between the party-state and society in the wake of the May 1960 amnesty: first, a shared 'class' or 'workerist' perspective, which was at times directed against named 'class' antagonists at the local or even residential level, and, second, what might be termed a populist illiberal sentiment.⁵² The Security Services archive is full of examples of class tensions and suspicions, which, although appearing as ostensible criticism of the amnesty, are better construed as sources of underlying affinity between diverse sectors of society and the communist regime. To be sure, the police documentation is exaggerated, over-ideologised and self-aggrandising, but it does impart a revealing – and we think largely persuasive – glimpse into the social resentments and cleavages that bubbled away below the surface of daily life. For instance, in a Prague paper mill, employees openly grumbled that workers remained in prison

while the 'gentlemen factory owners' (*páni fabrikanti*) and their supporters were released.⁵³ Similarly, citizens in Ústí nad Orlicí disagreed with the amnesty, saying that a worker who steals 2,000 crowns of property from the socialist state had to serve his or her entire sentence, while 'enemies' were released for 'anti-state crimes'. They intended to seek an explanation for this from the party's District Committee.⁵⁴ In the Kolín chemical works, it was stated that 'mainly workers should be released ... not members of anti-state groups' while at the Tatra factory in Česká Lípa, there was 'sharp criticism' about the fact that 'workers remained in prison, while class enemies were set free'.⁵⁵ A worker in Klatovy posed the rhetorical question: if the amnestants came to power in Czechoslovakia, would they release the communists?⁵⁶ A Slovak editor said it was a pity that 'out-and-out fascists, bloody [Hlinka] guards, people who have blood on their hands, people who have murdered and killed' had been included in the amnesty. 'They will now poison our political life.'⁵⁷

Individual 'class aliens' were also targeted. In Beroun district, local people opposed the reappointment of a Catholic priest to 'spiritual service' as 'he belongs down the mines'.⁵⁸ 'Progressive citizens' in Prague demanded that the amnestant Antonín Švehla, son of the pre-war Agrarian Prime Minister, should be 'moved out of his country estate'.⁵⁹ In the Moravian city of Olomouc, one returnee, Jaroslav Talášek, was 'not popular' in his community, because of his 'haughty behaviour and manner' as an ex-general in the Czechoslovak army.⁶⁰ Citizens in Třeboň criticised the release of a notary who had 'robbed the people' and in Prague, a released prisoner, who had been given a post in his former research institute, was reallocated a manual job in a building components factory after his co-employees and co-residents complained to the party District Committee.⁶¹ The 'majority of inhabitants' of Nořice were discontent about an anti-communist teacher getting his old job back in the local school, presumably because he would influence their children.⁶² In the Česká Lípa district, 'citizens were seriously agitated by the return of Josef Kulhánek, a down-right agent of CIC [the US army's Counter Intelligence Corps] and leader of an anti-state group'.⁶³

There was almost a biological reaction on the part of some citizens. Residents in Havlíčkův Brod, doubting that prison was fulfilling its 're-educative mission', proposed that all returnees should be removed to another housing estate, as if they were blighted by disease. One local family had four amnestants, one of whom was 'well known as a foreign intelligence agent', and their return 'would mean nothing good for the

community', especially as they had many relatives on the estate.⁶⁴ In eastern Bohemia, there were 'disturbances' among local workers against a certain Dočekal, a former band-master who had been imprisoned for eight years for hiding two 'anti-state criminals' in his home. Citizens disagreed 'on principle' with his amnesty and 'workers want to submit a protest to the central organs'. Likewise, an amnestied former manufacturer said that he had come back from a 'concentration camp', a contentious term which aroused disdain among local workers, who insisted that only those who had been 're-educated' in prison should be released.⁶⁵

Much of the archival record is also permeated by a distinct illiberalism often linked to a palpable sense of social injustice, even a measure of irrational envy. This very human sentiment, however, was generally couched in officially sanctioned rhetoric in order to provide an ideological alibi for the speaker or complainant. For example, citizens in Prague's 11th district 'protested' about the fact that some amnestants had been provided with accommodation without having to take their turn on the housing list, and a similar grumble occurred in Křivoklát.⁶⁶ Workers in central Bohemia lamented that returnees were being re-awarded their academic titles, civil and voting rights, and were even granted paid holidays. Inhabitants of the 'entire Chrudim district' were concerned that the crimes of the returnees were 'forgiven' and that they could lay claim to pensions. In addition, in one local community, 'citizens disagreed with the release of the majority of amnestied persons', saying that their time in prison had been too short to re-educate them. Amnestants were 'outright enemies of the system', who immediately after their discharge 'walked provocatively around' the village. In the Beroun area, one resident complained that the 'amnesty had released all the scum (*lumpové*)' and in the Mělník district, citizens bemoaned the release of one prisoner because he had been given a 12-year sentence, but had only served two. A Slovak editor intimated that many of his fellow citizens may not have shared his positive attitude to the amnesty: 'At last they've released completely innocent people. But only those who they haven't killed. And many would have preferred it if they had killed them.'⁶⁷ In the north Bohemian region, it was even reported that in general, 'ordinary workers' were of the 'firm opinion' that the 'scale of the amnesty was too democratic' and the liberation of 'hardened anti-state elements' would not 'pay off', as had been seen in Hungary and Poland in 1956.⁶⁸

What do the tortuous rehabilitation process and the multifarious reactions to it tell us about the Czechoslovak party and state-society

relations in the 1950s and 1960s? The problematic and fragmentary nature of party and secret police archives do not permit any sweeping generalisations, and thus all conclusions must be circumspect. That said, three broad assessments can be put forward. First, the release of political prisoners and the exposure of Stalinist crimes threatened a deep-seated fracture in party discipline, which potentially struck at the heart of communist authority and, to a certain extent, laid bare the fragilities of the regime as a whole. This was particularly so in regard to Slovak nationalism and the highly sensitive issue of Czech–Slovak mutual relations. This must explain, at least in part, why KSC dignitaries throughout the 1950s and 1960s were so reluctant to rehabilitate Stalinist victims judicially and politically. It wasn't simply the case that incumbent leaders feared for their own positions – they feared, implicitly if not explicitly, for the regime and state *per se*.

Second, the multi-dimensional popular responses to the 1960 amnesty suggest that the axiomatic Cold War stereotype of a presumed gulf between 'us' and 'them' – the 'good' people versus the 'evil' state – is overly simplistic. While many citizens did indeed use the occasion of the amnesty to vent their opposition to the existing order, many others adopted a position of 'critical loyalty' to the goals and visions of the communist regime, and appropriated and reformulated aspects of the official ideology in line with their daily experiences and personal views. This intermediate and constantly shifting nexus was based on a set of shared values and perceptions, or 'bridges' as we described them, some of which were short-term and provisional, others longer-term and more permanent, some ideological, others practical, some more embedded, others contingent on rapidly changing circumstances. To the extent that popular opinion showed distinct strains of illiberalism, authoritarianism, even forms of neo-Stalinism, the much-vaunted notion of Czech 'humanist democratic' political culture needs to be contested. In this sense, the varying shades of public reaction to rehabilitation force us to re-examine our preconceived notions of social norms and beliefs. Just as important, they reveal that fundamental communist ideological assumptions on class divisions, hostility towards 'enemies' and the 'superiority' of the working class appear to have influenced fairly broad social strata. However, one vital issue – the differing attitudes of Czechs and Slovaks – must await its researcher. Conventional wisdom would have it that 'pro-socialist' sentiment was stronger among the former than the latter, but opinion polls in post-communist Slovakia reveal that surprisingly high numbers of Slovaks looked back positively on the achievements of the period 1948–1989.⁶⁹

Finally, and more tentatively, the experience of amnesty and rehabilitation may tell us something new about the Prague Spring. Hitherto, the origins of 1968 are routinely interpreted as essentially an inner-party power struggle between the 'reformers' and the 'hardliners': Dubček versus Novotný. But there was also a very direct input 'from below' that had been rumbling away under the surface for many years: rank-and-file party members and lower-level functionaries, ex-prisoners and their families, members of the intelligentsia, and, we suspect, many 'ordinary' citizens had been pushing for redress and political reform since at least 1956, and the revelations of Stalinist illegalities and the release of prisoners by the amnesty of 1960 seem to have given a significant boost to this process.

Notes

1. Statistics from M. Hauner, 'Crime and Punishment in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Case of General Heliodor Píka and his Prosecutor Karel Vaš', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 9, no. 2–3 (2008), pp. 343–4; J. Bílek, *Pétépáci aneb Černí baroni úplně jinak* (Plzeň, 1996), p. 117. According to the Rehabilitation Law (No. 119/1990), in the entire period of communist rule in Czechoslovakia – 1948 to 1989 – 257,864 people were prosecuted for political 'crimes'. For an overview, see K. McDermott, 'Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia: Origins, Processes, Responses', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 98–118.
2. Statistics from J. Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials, 1950–1954: The Suppressed Report of the Dubček Government's Commission of Inquiry, 1968* (London, 1971), pp. 56–7; J. Foitzik, 'Souvislosti politických procesů ve střední a východní Evropě', in J. Pernes and J. Foitzik (eds), *Politické procesy v Československu po roce 1945 a 'případ Slánský'* (Brno, 2005), pp. 11, 13, 15–16; K. Kaplan and J. Váchová (eds), *Zemřelí ve věznicích a tresty smrti, 1948–1956: Seznamy* (Prague, 1992) pp. 53–60 and non-paginated addendum. For judicial executions, see O. Liška and coll., *Tresty smrti vykonané v Československu v letech 1918–1989* (Prague, 2006).
3. Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, p. 140.
4. A. Kýr, 'Některé sociologické aspekty zacházení s vězni v ČSR v letech 1945–1955', in D. Janák (ed.), *Vězeňské systémy v Československu a ve střední Evropě 1945–1955* (Opava, 2001), p. 33; R. Slabotínský, *Amnestie prezidenta republiky v letech 1960 a 1962 a rehabilitace politických vězňů v 60. letech*, PhD thesis, Masaryk University (Brno, 2010), p. 62.
5. Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, pp. 148, 150.
6. Slabotínský, *Amnestie prezidenta*, p. 148; H. G. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), pp. 400–1.
7. For examples of citizens' petitions, see the Archive of the President's Office (AKPR), sign. 01533/68: 'Rehabilitace'.
8. Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, p. 207.
9. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, p. 401.

10. Ibid., pp. 48–9; Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, pp. 224–40; K. Kaplan, *Druhý proces. Milada Horáková a spol. – rehabilitační řízení 1968–1990* (Prague, 2008), pp. 40–76.
11. For further details, see H. Grisová, 'Barnabitská' komise. Její činnost a výsledky, MA thesis, Palacký University (Olomouc, 2011); Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, pp. 241–3.
12. Cited in R. A. Remington (ed.), *Winter in Prague: Documents on Czechoslovak Communism in Crisis* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), p. 106.
13. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 391–5 (our emphasis).
14. For details on K-231, see J. Hoppe, *Opozice '68. Sociální demokracie, KAN a K 231 v období pražského jara* (Prague, 2009), pp. 265–72.
15. Cited in Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, p. 393.
16. Pelikán (ed.), *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, p. 131.
17. Kaplan, *Druhý proces*, pp. 91–102; Slabotinský, *Amnestie prezidenta*, pp. 225–9.
18. Interview with Pavel Levý in T. Bouška, K. Pínerová and M. Louč (eds), *Českoslovenští političtí vězni. Životní příběhy* (Prague, 2009), p. 230, fn. 33.
19. Slabotinský, *Amnestie prezidenta*, pp. 217–20.
20. Kaplan, *Druhý proces*, pp. 121–4.
21. F. Gebauer, 'Základní zásady zákona o soudní rehabilitaci č. 119/1990 Sb.', in in F. Gebauer, K. Kaplan, F. Koudelka and R. Vyhňálek (eds), *Soudní perzekuce politické povahy v Československu 1948–1989* (Prague, 1993), pp. 53–68.
22. F. Mayer, 'Vězení jako minulost, odboj jako paměť. Konfederace politických vězňů', *Soudobé dějiny*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2002), pp. 41–64.
23. Security Services Archive (ABS), f. H-186 'Ohlasy 1960', l. 120; ABS, f. H-186/3 'Amnestie 1960', ll. 253–4.
24. National Archive of the Czech Republic (NA), f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 732, ll. 6, 10; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 22, a.j. 754, l. 4.
25. NA, f. 014/12, sv. 21, a.j. 733, ll. 4, 6.
26. NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 36.
27. V. Sommer, *Angažované dějepisectví. Stranická historiografie mezi stalinismem a reformním komunismem (1950–1970)* (Prague, 2011), pp. 153–83.
28. NA, f. Předsednictvo 1962–1966, sv. 17, a.j. 18, ll. 7, 11, 15.
29. NA, f. 05/1, sv. 391, a.j. 2331, l. 35.
30. ABS, f. A34, inv. jedn. 2487 (non-paginated).
31. For further details, see S. Brown, 'Prelude to a Divorce? The Prague Spring as Dress Rehearsal for Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Divorce"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 10 (2008), p. 1788.
32. ABS, f. A34, inv. jedn. 1840, report from 28 June 1963 (non-paginated).
33. ABS, f. A34, inv. jedn. 1807, l. 1.
34. ABS, f. A5–81 microfiche 2 (non-paginated).
35. J. Cuhra, 'In the Shadow of Liberalization: Repressions in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s', *Cahiers du monde Russe*, vol. 47, no. 1–2 (2006), p. 423.
36. One amnestant, František Klápště, was assiduously followed for over four years after his release, even though his attitude to the communist regime was 'indifferent and absolutely passive'. See ABS, f. B4_4, inv. jedn. 23, ll. 1–23.
37. Cuhra, 'In the Shadow of Liberalization', p. 424.
38. ABS, f. A 34, inv. jedn. 1807, ll. 1–4; ABS, f. H-186, ll. 90, 91, 106; ABS, f. H-186/2 'Amnestie 1960', ll. 35, 36, 52, 134–5; ABS, f. H-186/3, ll. 228, 234, 251, 254, 271, 294, 400; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 37, a.j. 1438, l. 5.

39. J. Kopelentova Rehak, *Czech Political Prisoners: Recovering Face* (Lexington, KY, 2012), p. 119.
40. See ABS, f. H-186, ll. 68, 99, 111, 116; ABS, f. H-186/2, ll. 50, 95, 96, 105, 115, 117, 120, 122, 130, 139; ABS, f. H-186/3, ll. 63, 82, 85, 87, 178, 263, 267, 322, 329, 367, 378, 391–4, 400, 420; ABS, f. A5–81 microfiche 2 (non-paginated); and T. Bouška and K. Pinerová (eds), *Czechoslovak Political Prisoners: Life Stories of 5 Male and 5 Female Victims of Stalinism* (Prague, 2009), pp. 25, 95.
41. ABS, f. H-186/2, ll. 34–5, 77.
42. Ibid., ll. 223, 229–31, 234, 280, 307, 408–9; ABS, f. H-186/2, l. 138; NA, f. 02/2, sv. 273, a.j. 355, bod 15.
43. ABS, f. H-186/3, l. 2; see also ABS, f. A 34, inv. jedn. 1807, ll. 2–4.
44. ABS, f. H-186/2, l. 47.
45. *Rudé právo* and *Práce*, 9 May 1960. The amnesty was never mentioned thereafter in these two organs – perhaps an implicit recognition of its de-stabilising potential.
46. ABS, f. H-186/2, ll. 46, 51; ABS, f. H-186/3, ll. 1, 14, 22, 69, 204; NA, f. 014/12, sv. 35, a.j. 1378, l. 6.
47. ABS, f. H-186/3, l. 281.
48. Bouška and Pinerová (eds), *Czechoslovak Political Prisoners*, pp. 69–70. Importantly, Moravečková's memoirs, among others, suggest that state security reports were largely accurate reflections of the diverse popular responses to returnees.
49. ABS, f. H-186/3, ll. 183–4, 284; ABS, f. A2/2, inv. č. 681 (non-paginated); NA, f. 02/2, sv. 321, a.j. 408, bod 13.
50. For further details, see K. McDermott and V. Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged Conformists'? The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Popular Opinion and the Crisis of Communism, 1956*, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 66 (Washington, DC, 2013).
51. The first term is used by A. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 275; and the second by K.-M. Mallmann and G. Paul, 'Resistenz oder loyale Widerwilligkeit? Anmerkungen zu einem umstrittenen Begriff', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, no. 2 (1993), pp. 99–116.
52. The concept of 'tacit consensus' is adapted from T. Lindenberger, 'Tacit Minimal Consensus: The Always Precarious East German Dictatorship', in P. Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 208–22.
53. ABS, f. A5–81 microfiche 3 (non-paginated).
54. ABS, f. H-186/3, l. 26.
55. Ibid., ll. 36, 385; ABS, f. H-186/2, ll. 46–7.
56. ABS, f. A5–81 microfiche 2 (non-paginated).
57. ABS, f. H-186/2, l. 41.
58. ABS, f. H-186/3, l. 77.
59. ABS, f. H-186/2, l. 34.
60. Ibid., l. 68.
61. ABS, f. H-186/3, ll. 43, 54.
62. Ibid., l. 107.
63. ABS, f. H-186/2, ll. 47; see also NA, f. 014/12, sv. 35, a.j. 1378, Information Bulletin, 19 May 1960.

64. ABS, f. H-186/3, ll. 26–7.
65. *Ibid.*, l. 25.
66. ABS, f. H-186/2, l. 38; ABS, f. H-186/3, l. 37.
67. ABS, f. H-186/3, ll. 13, 25, 27, 36, 78, 94.
68. ABS, f. H-186/2, l. 46. Similar views were voiced in the Břeclav district in south Moravia. See ABS, f. H-186/3, l. 367.
69. J. Marušiak, 'The Normalisation Regime and its Impact on Slovak Domestic Policy After 1970', in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 10 (2008), pp. 1815, 1822.

7

Rehabilitation in Romania: The Case of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu

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On 17 April 1954, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, one of the founders and leaders of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), was executed as a supposed traitor. According to the official report:

at 2 am, one hour before execution time, we went to the cell of the accused, informing him that the time had come to expiate his guilt. We asked him whether he had anything to confess, or whether we could do anything for him. He answered negatively.... The assistant judge of the Military Committee of the Supreme Tribunal read out the verdict in front of the execution squad. Pătrășcanu was led to the execution site, a blindfold was put over him, and he was shot, today, 17 April 1954, at 3 am.¹

However, 14 years later, on the orders of the new party leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, a special commission appointed to address the Pătrășcanu case concluded that

although the papers were filed in accordance with the usual procedures, the execution took place in irregular circumstances: those in charge went to Pătrășcanu's cell and asked him whether he would like to express a final wish. Pătrășcanu, with defiance and dignity answered: 'Come on, finish quickly what you have begun!' After that he was blinded using special glasses found in prisons, taken from his cell and led through a corridor at the end of which there was an inner yard, covered in sand. There, as Pătrășcanu was pushed to go forward, he was shot in the back of the head with a pistol. After he fell, as he was still moving, so he was shot again, several times.²

How did the most popular of the main figures in the RCP reach such a Kafkaesque ending? What do the discourses surrounding his trial, and those surrounding his 1968 rehabilitation, tell us about Romania's communist imaginary, and more specifically about when, why and on what terms Stalinist-era victims were rehabilitated in Romania?

This chapter uses the case of Pătrășcanu as a seminal example of rehabilitation practices in Romania. In particular it will show how Romania's post-Stalinist communist leadership aimed to rehabilitate a few (and forget many) of those who had been imprisoned or executed in the first decade after the establishment of one-party rule in 1947. The career, trial and rehabilitation of Pătrășcanu span the entire history of the RCP, from its founding in 1921 to the final phase of its existence during the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965–1989). As such, the re-examination of the original verdict against Pătrășcanu in 1968 can be seen as paving the way for all subsequent rehabilitations, while at the same time closing the door for many others. While focusing on Pătrășcanu, I shall compare and contrast his trial and rehabilitation with related cases involving party members or members of the anti-communist resistance, and discuss the reasons why some were rehabilitated and some not.

For a theoretical framework, I follow the work of Kevin Adamson on discourses and political imaginary in post-Second World War Romania.³ In Adamson's understanding, show trials, practices of forgetting or acts of remembering through public rehabilitations (whether of the judicial, social or moral kind) are political statements that signal subtle or clear-cut changes in the way that the ruling party sought to build consent and/or justify a new ideological stance. At the same time, Adamson rejects as reductionist the view of the RCP's history as a 'simple trajectory beginning with proletcultist orthodoxy and ending with a thinly veiled legitimating ideology of nationalism'.⁴ Rather, the regime began with a discourse built upon the antinomy: 'the Party and the people' versus a series of 'enemies'. If, after 1962–1964, this discourse changed and became much more nation-state centred in comparison with the previous decade, we have to avoid the trap of a crude dichotomy pitting the 'Marxist-Leninist' discourse against the 'national' discourse. Instead, Adamson links 'the preoccupation of the regime with achieving autonomy from the Soviet Union with the production of national symbols justified by reference to Marxism-Leninism', thereby showing how "'the people" came to be inscribed in a battle for independence against foreign interference'. This is why, from the early 1960s, the regime relied heavily on 'symbols of the nation as it re-inscribed the meaning of socialism in Romania; this re-inscription linked emancipation,

development, and welfare of “the people” to national independence and the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu’.⁵ As I shall argue below, the rehabilitation of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu in 1968 both typifies and brings together these two communist imaginaries.

Historical context

The RCP had a quasi-invisible presence between the world wars. Created in 1921, it was banned in 1924 and from then on continued as a network of illegal activists led by Moscow’s Comintern, with a maximum of about 1,000 members.⁶ In a country where, according to the 1930 census, almost 40 per cent of the population was illiterate and where more than 80 per cent was employed in an agricultural sector dominated by small farms, the appeal of a party of the industrial proletariat was understandably limited.⁷ Moreover, following the ideological dictates of the Comintern, the RCP defined the enlarged Romania of the post-First World War period as an imperialist state and oppressor of its recently acquired provinces, namely Bessarabia (claimed by the Soviet Union) and Transylvania (disputed with Hungary). This thesis meant electoral suicide for the RCP.

All of this changed after the Second World War. Romania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence dates from 23 August 1944, when the country abandoned its alliance with Hitler’s Germany and joined the allied forces. The authoritarian, pro-Nazi regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu was toppled by a *coup d’etat* led by the young King Michael, supported by the army and by the major political parties (including, to please the Soviet Union, the negligible RCP). From then on, the communists’ rise to power, backed by the Soviet Union, was gradual but steady. Red Army troops were stationed in the country while Churchill and Stalin, representing the allied powers, had already carved out new spheres of influence that would, later on, be defined by the Iron Curtain. The first prime minister linked to the RCP was appointed in March 1945. The 1946 elections were ‘won’ (albeit through use of widespread fraud)⁸ by a communist-led coalition, and finally, on 30 December 1947, the last guarantor of a liberal democratic regime, King Michael, was forced to abdicate. The end of 1947 marked the birth of a new, ‘popular and democratic’ republic under full-scale communist domination, but also the beginning of Pătrășcanu’s fall from power and grace.

The case of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu

Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was born in 1900. His father was a well-known intellectual and professor, and his mother came from an aristocratic

background. He grew up as a member of the privileged elite and joined Romania's Socialist Party immediately after graduating from high school.⁹ As a young law student, he took part in the 1921 Congress that marked the transformation of Romania's Socialist Party into the RCP, as well as its affiliation to the Third (Communist) International or Comintern.¹⁰ Following the split between the social democrats and the communists, Pătrășcanu sided with the latter – as did figures like the heir of a rich Jewish family Marcel Pauker and his future wife, Ana Pauker. All three attended the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow, in 1922, where they met Lenin. Henceforth they formed part of the small world of Romanian communism. (In the words of Vladimir Tismaneanu, at this stage, they were less like a political party and more like a 'messianic sect'.)¹¹

Between 1922 and 1925, Pătrășcanu studied law and economics at the University of Leipzig and achieved his doctorate. Meanwhile, following the ban on the RCP in 1924, its activities became secret and its members were driven underground, a situation that lasted until 1944. During the period of illegality, the party became even more dependent on the Comintern for funding and direction, and Pătrășcanu travelled on a number of occasions to Moscow. He was also arrested and imprisoned several times in Romania. Nevertheless, he became a member of the Central Committee of the RCP in 1931, and, in the same year, he was elected to the Romanian parliament on the list put forward by the League of Peasants and of the Workers (*Blocul Muncitoresc-Țărănesc*), a front organisation created in order to fill the place of the outlawed Communist Party. Despite his work for the party and his political achievements, Pătrășcanu failed to emerge as a leader of the party: on the contrary, he was constantly arguing with other senior functionaries. One party member, Richard Wurmbrandt, described him as being:

in a state of permanent conflict with the various Central Committees that were formed in those years. He managed to be in opposition to the Central Committee's line even when he was one of its members. It was easy to see in him the resentment of the intellectual who is not granted the proper place by the others, the 'uncultured'.¹²

As Lavinia Betea has noted, this early activity, including the Moscow visits and adherence to the Soviet-backed thesis that the Romanian state should end its imperialist ambitions and grant 'self-determination' to the non-Romanian subject nationalities it had repressed since 1918, is difficult to square with the later image of Pătrășcanu, the

nationalist-minded communist.¹³ His stance in the period after 1924 is indeed hard to gauge. On the one hand it seems that he was not opposed to the 'Muscovite' faction in the RCP. On the other hand, it appears that in 1931 he protested against the Soviet-inspired distinction between Moldavians and Romanians at the Fifth Congress of the RCP, which took place on Soviet soil because of the ongoing ban on the party in Romania.¹⁴

His chance to rise among his peers came in 1944, as Soviet troops approached Romania's border. Allied with Nazi Germany, the Romanian army was retreating and the military circumstances gave birth to a sudden flurry of political activity: the young King Michael, in concert with the leaders of the main opposition parties, agreed to arrest Marshal Antonescu and switch sides – in other words, to abandon Hitler and join the United Nations.¹⁵ The three main parties of the country, the Peasant Party (PNȚ), the National Liberal Party (PNL), and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) accepted the necessity of inviting the RCP to join the anti-Antonescu conspiracy, given the proximity of the Soviet Union and the influence Moscow was supposed to have in the region, after the predictable demise of Hitler. However, the RCP was at that point going through a leadership crisis, as Moscow's guidance was at best intermittent in a country still officially at war with the Soviet Union.

In theory, the General Secretary of the RCP was Stefan Foriș. However, although he had been appointed by the Comintern, he proved to be a divisive figure and had few followers. The overwhelming majority of party leaders were in prison and organised their own (informal) structures, which were dominated by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Another group, with Ana Pauker as a prominent figure, was in Moscow, working for the Comintern (her husband Marcel Pauker had been executed during the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s). Since 1938, Pătrășcanu had ceased to hold any leadership positions in the party. After some periods of incarceration, his influential family managed to get him out of prison into a softer 'house arrest' at the family mansion in the countryside where, by and large, he remained until 1944. A short-lived attempt to compete with Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej for party primacy while they shared the same prison did not bear fruit, and left Pătrășcanu in a limbo situation vis-à-vis the power centres of the party. In short, he had no connection with the Moscow group, no sympathies from General Secretary Foriș, and a hidden rivalry with the most influential communist leader in Romania, Gheorghiu-Dej.

This is the moment when, at the initiative of the group led by Gheorghiu-Dej, Foriș was deposed and replaced by a little-known figure

with no real influence in the party, Constantin Pârvulescu, in April 1944.¹⁶ The power vacuum favoured Pătrășcanu, who was courted by the Palace and the major political parties. The latter were looking for an approachable communist party leader to join the anti-Antonescu conspiracy, while Pătrășcanu in turn saw an opportunity to become a figure of national prominence. With the uncertain blessing of a beheaded party organisation, he managed to impress the King and to play a significant role in the 23 August coup. He was appointed Minister of Justice in the first three governments after the coup, and for some time remained the only communist minister (initially 'ad interim').¹⁷ Although he did not have any formal leadership positions in the party, Pătrășcanu managed to appear as the only recognisable communist figure in the public sphere. He became a university professor while still acting as Minister of Justice, and published a highly influential book, *Under Three Dictatorships*, which was arguably the best analysis of Romanian social and political history during the 1930s and 1940s to that date.¹⁸

The 23 August coup, as well as Pătrășcanu's involvement in it, did not go down well with the Soviet leadership. The latter did not tolerate initiatives that it could not foresee, much less control. Immediately after the coup, Ana Pauker was sent by Georgi Dimitrov, the former head of the Comintern, to take charge of the party and reform its structures so that it could be more easily controlled by the Soviets. The new leadership of the party became collective: although Gheorghiu-Dej was appointed General Secretary, real power rested in the hands of Pauker, with Pătrășcanu an influential, although increasingly isolated, member of the Central Committee.¹⁹ In the years after 1944, he helped to transform Romania's justice system along Soviet lines and acted as an important figure in the party.

It appears that he took steps to exploit and maximise his popularity. As a party leader, he travelled to Cluj, Transylvania's main city, in June 1945. Cluj, as well as north-western Transylvania, had been a part of Horthy's Hungary from 1940 until 1944, and the inter-ethnic tensions between Romanians and Hungarians were far from being resolved there. In a context in which the new, communist-led government in Bucharest was perceived as leaning too much towards the Hungarian side, Pătrășcanu delivered a famous speech in which he talked not only in terms of class, but also in terms of nation. He attacked those who still used money issued by the defunct fascist Hungarian regime, and criticised the practice whereby majority Hungarian-speaking areas or institutions used only the Soviet flag and forgot the Romanian one, insisting

that the official language of the state was Romanian.²⁰ According to some oral history accounts, this stance was well received and boosted the numbers of those joining the RCP in Cluj.²¹ The discourse of Romanian nationhood was repeated with similar success at Sibiu, home to historic communities of ethnic Germans and Hungarians as well as Romanians. Pătrășcanu also spoke in the same vein when he returned to Transylvania during the elections of 1946.

By bringing in these references to nation and siding with the Romanian cause in an ethnically tense situation, Pătrășcanu managed to become a very popular figure. Even 60 years later, interviews conducted among Transylvanian peasants for a study of collectivisation in Romania revealed positive memories of him and his speeches in 1945 and 1946.²² He is alleged to have said – and this is a widely popular legend – that ‘before being a communist, I am Romanian!’. This topos marks the way he is remembered, by and large, in Romania, even today. My paternal grandmother (born in 1923) was proud to tell me that she once offered Pătrășcanu flowers during a visit he made to her village during the 1946 election campaign. The pride she felt was not so much related to his importance in the party apparatus but was rather connected, retrospectively, to his nation-centred stance. The intellectuals, the urban bourgeoisie and the peasantry were all drawn to this unusual communist. This does not mean that he had won them over entirely: in 1946, in spite of his intense electoral campaigning and his charismatic presence, he managed to get at best 19 per cent of the votes in the Arad county constituency where he was standing as a parliamentary candidate.²³ However, among the communist politicians of the time, he was undoubtedly the most popular.

The class war rhetoric of Romania’s communists was for the first time mixed with elements of a nationalist discourse. It was Pătrășcanu’s achievement to blend the two, and to test out a new imaginary, whereby Marxist–Leninism was combined with a discourse in which the Romanian language and nation were also important. In the search for a means of transforming a former ‘cult’ of fewer than 1,000 members into a mass party of the people, led by a popular, charismatic and easily recognisable figure of authority, Pătrășcanu offered one possible way forward.

In May 1946, ethnic clashes in Cluj between Romanian students and Hungarian workers persuaded two leading party dignitaries to visit the town. The first, Teohari Georgescu, Minister of Internal Affairs, chastised the Romanian students and their professors for stirring up prejudice against the Hungarian minority. The second, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu,

who spoke in his capacity not as a party leader but as a university professor, reiterated his Romanian nationalist position, with an electrifying public success.²⁴

Back in Bucharest, Pătrășcanu was obliged to recant and engage in self-criticism. Increasingly he found himself shunned by other leading figures in the party. His sense of isolation reached a climax at the end of the following year when he only found about the 'voluntary' abdication of King Michael and the proclamation of a republic through the same channels as ordinary citizens, and was not made privy to the behind-the-scenes manoeuvres. This signalled in effect that he had been eliminated from the inner circle of power. At the party congress of February 1948, he was publicly criticised and removed from his position in the Central Committee after being denied the opportunity to defend himself.²⁵ Finally, on 28 April 1948, he and his wife were arrested and held initially in a house owned by the party. Later, in the autumn of 1949, they were transferred to a prison, where Pătrășcanu remained for the next five years, up to his execution. The June 1948 plenary of the Central Committee publicly proclaimed that 'Pătrășcanu denies the leading role of the proletariat, and attributes this role to the bourgeoisie'. He had also supposedly 'adopted a line that is nationalistic-chauvinistic'. The party therefore condemned 'the counter-revolutionary theories of Pătrășcanu, which are inspired by the ideology and the interests of the class enemy'.²⁶ Against Pătrășcanu, the party leadership articulated a double critique: he sided with the class enemy and he erred in a nationalistic direction. Both elements of the new political imaginary in the late Stalinist period were present in this public condemnation.

Pătrășcanu's fall from grace and eventual execution can be easily attributed to the hostility toward him shown by the rising power in the party, Gheorghiu-Dej, and his own failure to secure alliances with other heavy-weights in the party (Ana Pauker, for instance). At the same time, not only was he not supported by Moscow, but he was perceived as acting independently or having shown 'nationalistic' tendencies by the Soviet leadership.²⁷ Up until Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet 'special advisers' took part in, and sometimes directed, the interrogation of Pătrășcanu.²⁸ However, the arrest, the interrogations and the trial extended for a period of six years. The accusations changed, in other words, according to the political and international context.

Space does not allow for a detailed account of all the intricacies and nuances behind the case conducted against Pătrășcanu. A few weeks after his arrest, the conflict between Tito and the Soviet Union led

to the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform. Consequently, Pătrășcanu became a 'Titoist agent', although at the time of his arrest this accusation would not have been conceivable and was only put to him later, during the course of interrogations. At this point his trajectory could have been the same as that of László Rajk in neighbouring Hungary, who – as Andrea Pető relates in her contribution to this volume – was executed after a show trial in Budapest in 1949. Indeed, just after these events in Budapest, Gheorghiu-Dej reported on Pătrășcanu at a meeting of the Cominform in November 1949, naming him as an agent of the Americans and the British alongside Rajk, Tito and the Bulgarian communist Traicho Kostov.²⁹ However, the other leaders of the RCP (especially Ana Pauker and Teohari Georgescu) chose another path and exercised a collective veto on Gheorghiu-Dej's plans: instead of following the Soviet line, as Hungary and Bulgaria did, a Romanian Rajk trial never took place. Even so, Pătrășcanu remained in prison.

The removal of the Ana Pauker–Teohari Georgescu–Vasile Luca faction from the Romanian Politburo in May 1952 and the concentration of sole power in the hands of Gheorghiu-Dej opened the way for the most cruel and most 'inventive' part of the Pătrășcanu saga: torture was widely used among those arrested in relation to his case and an entire conspiracy was concocted, and 'confessed' to by his former friends and colleagues – yet never by Pătrășcanu himself.³⁰

The change of direction which followed the fall of Pauker must also be related to the Slánský trial in Czechoslovakia.³¹ Like Slánský and most of his co-defendants, Pauker was Jewish, and the decision of Stalin to favour Gheorghiu-Dej and not Pauker cannot be isolated from his growing anti-Semitism, culminating in the famous Moscow 'Doctors' Plot' of January 1953.³² As in the case of the falsely accused Jewish doctors, Stalin's death ensured that a trial of Ana Pauker never took place. She was excluded from the party in 1954 and until her death in 1960, she was marginalised and 'periodically ... attacked by the party's leaders and propagandists'.³³ Her colleagues fared worse than her: Georgescu and Luca were imprisoned after 1953, the latter dying while still in jail in 1963 and the former being released in April 1956.

Returning to Pătrășcanu, after Stalin's death the pressure from Moscow to punish him evaporated. The Soviet advisers disappeared from the scene as the new leadership in the Kremlin embarked on a policy of de-Stalinisation and mass releases from the Gulag. In a quasi-paradoxical development, this is precisely the moment when the handling of the Pătrășcanu case by the Romanian authorities began to resemble more and more the Stalinist show trials of the 1930s. The

decision to execute Pătrășcanu in 1954 has to be understood in this larger context. According to Tismaneanu:

Gheorghiu-Dej was conscious of the Moscow meetings with the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Soviet Politburo's scathing critique of Mátyás Rákosi as well as the imposition by Moscow of Imre Nagy as Hungary's prime minister (1953–1955). He realized that Pătrășcanu could have been used by the new Soviet leadership as a candidate to replace him at the helm of RCP. Precisely because he wanted to prevent such a denouement of the 'New Course' in Romania, Dej preferred to act without delay and physically suppress his nemesis.³⁴

Remus Koffler, the former assistant of Foriș and a co-defendant at Pătrășcanu's trial, was executed on the same night. He too was Jewish.

The rehabilitations

The rehabilitations in the Romanian context were almost exclusively concentrated around the years 1968–1969. As such, they had nothing to do with pressures for reform coming from the Kremlin or a desire to act in harmony with neighbouring socialist countries. Rather, they were an important signifier of the new discourse of the party, originating in Gheorghiu-Dej's policy of greater autonomy from Moscow after 1962 and culminating in Ceaușescu's unilateral decision not to commit Romanian troops to the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

While before and after the famous 'secret speech' in February 1956 at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev embarked on a course of de-Stalinisation, the Romanian party aimed at separating itself from the new Moscow line and pursued its own 'national and independent' course, preserving at the same time its leadership and its Stalinist centralism.³⁵ The main element of this course was Romanian criticism of the so-called Valev plan of June 1962, which called for a new 'international division of labour' within the socialist bloc, allocating heavy industry to the North (Czechoslovakia and East Germany) and an exclusively agrarian development to the South (mainly Romania and Bulgaria). By April 1964, the Romanian regime was openly opposed to Moscow's initiative. Using the new Sino-Soviet conflict, the regime tried to acquire a position that would have allowed for an increased bargaining power. Discursively, the new course adopted by Gheorghiu-Dej was

very much a return to the one opened by Pătrășcanu. History textbooks now placed less influence on the importance of Russian influence on Romania's past and present, and formerly 'nationalistic' or 'bourgeois' poets and novelists were rehabilitated as the main figures of Romania's culture.

The same year, 1964, marks another major event: Gheorghiu-Dej set free all remaining political prisoners, both as an indicator that the regime was consolidated and as a signal that the oppressive 'Stalinist' system was being reformed. In fact, this was the last of a series of three amnesties which reduced the number of prisoners in Romania serving sentences for 'offences against the state' from 17,613 in 1960 to 13,017 in 1962, 9,333 in 1963 and almost zero in 1964.³⁶ This implied (but did not necessarily mean) a weakening of the 'class struggle': the former class enemies were freed and expected to cooperate with the new party line defending the 'national' interest against (among other things) Moscow's interference.

Significantly, the liberation of the political prisoners was not accompanied by any form of rehabilitation, whether moral or legal. On the contrary, in many cases, the former political prisoners were not in fact released: rather they were relocated to remote rural areas where they had to live for several months or years in a form of village arrest. These were the circumstances when Gheorghiu-Dej's unexpected death from lung cancer in March 1965 led to the rise of Ceaușescu, who took over as General Secretary and re-launched the course opened by his predecessor.

The rehabilitation process undertaken by the Romanian party can be understood only against the background of the policy of autonomy from the Soviet Union, as the new leader attempted to build his power base at home. Ceaușescu did not enjoy a strong position within the collective that led the party after Gheorghiu-Dej's death. He was surrounded by the past leader's associates, and one of the reasons why he was elected General Secretary was the hope that he would prove easy to control and manipulate. His trajectory illustrates clearly that his goal was to demote all those who would not submit to his will and replace them with his own appointees, pursuing the same Stalinist ideal of a General Secretary with undisputed and unlimited authority.

In the spring of 1966, less than two years after coming to office, Ceaușescu formed a 'collective' or investigative commission with the goal of revisiting Pătrășcanu's trial and execution. He chose as its leader one of his supporters, the young secretary of the Central Committee, Vasile Patilineț. Grigore Răduică, another secretary of the Central Committee, was to coordinate the activities of the commission on a day to day basis.

Răduică left us a memoir, published in 1999, detailing his involvement in the rehabilitation of Pătrășcanu.³⁷ As Pavel Câmpeanu has emphasised, this was not a formal or public commission, and the investigative process completely lacked transparency.³⁸ No one, except Ceaușescu and his immediate entourage, knew about it. The work of the commission had to take place in the utmost secrecy, with all the documents gathered, read and discussed in the office of Răduică. Why the secrecy? As soon became apparent, a significant goal of the investigation was to blame one of the heavy-weights of the party, Alexandru Drăghici, for the unfair trial and execution of Pătrășcanu. Far from being driven by any moral desire to restore justice and the rule of law, the rehabilitation of Pătrășcanu, according to Câmpeanu, 'had been managed by [the same] party militants, who, throughout his six years of incarceration, had either taken an active part in his condemnation, or had refused to lift a finger to help their former comrade'.³⁹

The final report was delivered to Ceaușescu on 20 April 1968 and three days later it was presented at the Permanent Chairmanship of the Executive Political Committee. As a result of the report, Alexandru Drăghici, leader of the Secret Police (*Securitate*) and Minister of Internal Affairs at the time of Pătrășcanu trial, was marginalised and ceased to be a significant political figure in communist Romania.⁴⁰

The plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the RCP on 22–25 April 1968 made public the report, and Pătrășcanu's rehabilitation was thereby transformed into a propaganda tool. The findings of the secret party commission, as well as the errors of the past, were publicised, and public discussions were organised in factories and institutions. Previously classified reports about harsh prison conditions, provided by those convicted with Pătrășcanu, were laid open with the propagandistic aim of emphasising the injustices of the party leadership under Gheorghiu-Dej as well as the unnecessary cruelty of the *Securitate* under Drăghici. For instance, in her memoirs, Lena Constante mentions how use was made of some of the details she provided to the investigative commission about her 14 years spent in prison as one of the co-accused in the Pătrășcanu case. In solitary confinement, she used to feed a couple of sparrows out of her miserable food ration until this was discovered and the jailers blocked the birds' entry in the cell because it represented an unjustified relief for the prisoner.⁴¹

Pătrășcanu's political rehabilitation was followed by a judicial process. Some, but not all, of those condemned together with Pătrășcanu had their convictions overturned.⁴² Koffler had been executed along with Pătrășcanu in 1954, and another of the defendants had died in jail.

Surviving members of the group, including Constante, were able to work again and also received a small pension for the years they had lost in prison.

Pătrășcanu's rehabilitation opened the gate for a series of other rehabilitations: some of former party members or leaders and some of former 'enemies' of the party. Those rehabilitees who were still alive were able to work again and as above, also received a small pension for the years they had lost in prison. However, the gate closed rather soon, and no other major rehabilitations preceded or followed the 1968–1969 period.⁴³ During the late 1940s and the first half of the 1950s, bourgeois and social democrat politicians, members of the urban middle class, influential peasants or priests, communists accused of being spies or traitors, and anyone who might have become a potential adversary of the RCP's policies could end up in prison.⁴⁴ Yet only some of these 'political prisoners' (freed by Gheorghiu-Dej's amnesty of 1964) were deemed to be worthy of rehabilitation. The case of Adrian Marino (1921–2005) is typical in this sense, illustrating the political and cultural atmosphere in post-1964 Romania. Marino was the offspring of a well-to-do, intellectual family, a very promising young literary critic and an assistant professor of literature. Although he was not involved in politics prior to the transition to a communist dictatorship, he got involved in anti-communist agitation and was arrested in 1949 for distributing PNT literature aimed at young Romanians. For this he was imprisoned for seven years, followed by a further six years of forced domicile in a remote village in southern Romania. In 1963 he was allowed to move to Cluj, a university town, where he was offered a job as a manual worker in a beer factory, a job he refused. Instead, he lived on his wife's income. From 1964 he was allowed to write, initially under a pseudonym. In 1965 he published a first book of literary history, followed by a second one in 1967, both of which were very well received by the literary and cultural world in Romania. All these events occurred while Marino was not formally rehabilitated – he had to wait until 1969 for his name to be finally cleared. Marino's post-rehabilitation career included receiving three major Romanian awards: the Romanian Writers' Union prize in 1969 and again in 1981, as well as Romania's Academy prize in 1976 and the prestigious, Vienna-based, Herder award, in 1985. From 1973 he served as editor of an important French-language literary journal aimed at an international audience, the *Cahiers Roumains d'Études Littéraires*, without ever joining the RCP.

In his memoirs, Marino states that even though he had not submitted any 'request to be rehabilitated', he was summoned to appear before the

Central Committee, where he was informed that his 'request' had been approved. Judicial proceedings were opened, and alongside four other former political prisoners, his civil rights were reinstated in 1969.⁴⁵ Why these five? They had all been political prisoners, but for different reasons, at different times, and from the point of view of their 'guilt', they did not belong in the same judicial category. Their rehabilitation did not have anything to do with their alleged 'crimes' but with what they had in common in 1964; they were well-known budding writers and literary critics: Marino, Ion Caraion, Ștefan Augustin-Doinaș, Virgil Cărianopol and Vladimir Streinu. Through these rehabilitations the regime achieved two things: on one hand, it was able to co-opt, selectively, those who had proved that they could be used in the production of the post-1964 political and cultural imaginary, and on the other hand new authors and new nuances were needed to enrich the post-1964 'New Course'.

Another round of rehabilitations involved party members who had been punished or marginalised under Stalin or Gheorghiu-Dej. What were the criteria for rehabilitating some and not others? For instance, besides rehabilitating the former leaders of the RCP purged and murdered in Moscow in the late 1930s (Marcel Pauker, among others), both Luca and Georgescu were rehabilitated at the April 1968 plenary, the former posthumously, the latter as a private citizen and pensioner who was restored to the Central Committee in 1972. The case of Ana Pauker constitutes a glaring omission, however. Why were the victims of the Moscow purges, followed by Pătrășcanu, and then Luca and Georgescu rehabilitated, while Pauker was not?

Looking at the rehabilitation processes as a discursive performance, we can identify an effort to make the building-blocks of the discourse 'fit'. For instance, the history of Romania had been rewritten in the late 1940s – under the 'guidance' of Mihai Roller, the founding father of Marxist–Leninist historiography in post-war Romania – in order to stress the Slavic origins of Romanians, and the 'constant' connections between Russians and Romanians. However, the same Roller later confessed to the sociologist Pavel Câmpeanu that he had not been able to make a hero out of the case of a young communist resistance fighter, executed in 1943, who died shouting, 'Long live the Romanian Communist Party!' simply because of his obviously Jewish name.⁴⁶

From this perspective, Pătrășcanu was easily cast in the role of the 'nationally minded' popular communist. By contrast, Ana Pauker was neither popular, nor easily linked to a nationalistic discourse: she was a Jewish woman, living in a society that did not, as a rule, show much toleration for Jews (or for women in politics).⁴⁷ Even worse, she

was associated in the Romanian imaginary with the Moscow-trained communists, against whom the Romanian-based communists (such as Gheorghiu-Dej) had to struggle for party supremacy. The new imaginary taken over by Ceaușescu, reinscribing the national-communist elements in the hegemonic discourse of Marxist–Leninism, could hardly ‘fit’ the Jewish ‘Muscovite agent Pauker’ in its line, and therefore continued to treat her as a ‘non-person’.

Again, this particular aspect of the rehabilitation process did not last. According to Răduică, after finishing their initial task, the same secret party commission that investigated the case of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu began to work on a few other cases, only to be blocked by Ceaușescu, who declared that the judicial authorities would take over the task (they never did).⁴⁸ Adding insult to injury, some of the party leaders who, according to the commission’s findings, appeared to have committed crimes (for example, Gheorghe Pintilie-Pantiușa, the first leader of the *Securitate*) were subsequently decorated by Ceaușescu, in 1971.⁴⁹ While reference to the ‘national’ dimension of the 1968 rehabilitation process appeared time and again in the following decades, any moral critique of past illegalities and the excesses of the communist regime was soon forgotten. Pătrășcanu’s restored reputation as ‘first a Romanian and then a communist’ was a prominent element in the new imaginary. On the other hand, the Romanian Jew Koffler, who had been executed alongside Pătrășcanu, or the ethnic Hungarian Luca, who, as we have seen, had died in prison in 1963, were ‘merely’ victims of Stalinism and as such were hardly ever mentioned again after 1968–1969.

Conclusion

The rehabilitation process, to paraphrase a concept of a Romanian philosopher, Constantin Noica, was an ‘opening which closes’.⁵⁰ While on the one hand, the party seemed to acknowledge its past mistakes and publicly discuss them, this happened in a top-down, non-transparent and highly selective way, at the command of the party leadership rather than as a result of pressures from below for a moral reckoning with the past or a restoration of the rule of law. In the light of the new political discourses, some victims were more equal than others – or, to be more precise, more useful than others. Building on the political vocabulary put in place by Pătrășcanu, the rehabilitations of 1968–1969 were used by Ceaușescu as a tool to establish and articulate a new political imaginary. This political imaginary was of course entirely divorced from Ceaușescu’s new-found (but nonetheless highly misleading) reputation

in the west as an independent-minded communist who had stood up to the Kremlin by refusing to take part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Rather, 'the appropriation of "the nation" as a symbol by the party was a careful strategy for the negotiation of Marxism–Leninism'⁵¹ and an important step in the Romanian dictator's quest to attain the position of unique, unaccountable and infallible leader of the party.

Notes

1. G. Răduică, *Crime în lupta pentru putere: 1966–1968 ancheta cazului Pătrășcanu* (Bucharest, 1999), pp. 167–8. I chose to follow the findings of the formal committee entrusted with reconsidering Pătrășcanu's case in 1968 instead of the oral account, according to which he was shot in his cell, through the prison door window, as described in R. Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley, CA, 2001), p. 152.
2. Răduică, *Crime în lupta pentru putere*, p. 168.
3. K. Adamson, 'Socialism, Revolution, and Transition: The Ideological Construction of the Romanian Post-Communist Order', PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2005. The idea behind this article has to be credited to Kevin Adamson. We planned to write it together and I am very grateful for all his insights and suggestions, and very sorry he decided in the end that he could not do it.
4. Adamson, 'Socialism, Revolution, and Transition', p. 35.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
6. V. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), p. 88.
7. S. Manuilă, *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930* (Bucharest, 1931).
8. V. Târău, *Alegeri fără opțiune* (Cluj-Napoca, 2005), pp. 491–2.
9. Here and below, I rely on the detailed biography of Pătrășcanu by L. Betea, *Moartea unui lider comunist* (Bucharest, 2011).
10. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*, p. 48.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–84.
12. Betea, *Moartea unui lider comunist*, p. 33, quoting the Archives of Romania's Secret Service (ASRI), fond P, dossier 40002, p. 44 (Declaration of R. Wurmbrandt, 30 August 1951).
13. Betea, *Moartea unui lider comunist*, p. 23.
14. 'Pătrășcanu a primit un glonț în ceafă', in *Jurnalul National*, Bucharest, 8 March 2004 – see <http://jurnalul.ro/special-jurnalul/patrascanu-a-primit-un-glon-t-in-ceafa-71798.html> (accessed 23 December 2014).
15. K. Hitchins, *Romania, 1866–1947* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 497–500.
16. Foriș was later kidnapped and assassinated on the instructions of the party leadership in 1946.
17. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*, p. 90. In the following two governments he was joined by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (Minister of Communications) and Teohari Georgescu (Minister of Internal Affairs).
18. L. Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi* (Bucharest, 1945).

19. For a brilliant analysis of the leadership situation in post-1944 Romania, see P. Câmpeanu, *Ceașescu, anii numărătorii inverse* (Iași, 2002), pp. 156–64.
20. Betea, *Moartea unui lider comunist*, pp. 97–8.
21. See Levy, *Ana Pauker*, p. 138.
22. C. Goina, 'Do Not Leave for Tomorrow What You Can Do Today! An Exercise on the Birth of a Kolkhoz-model', in D. Dobrinu and C. Iordachi (eds), *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949–1962* (Budapest, 1999), pp. 368–92.
23. I refer here to the real count, for as everywhere in Romania, the official count of the 1946 vote was carefully manipulated to ensure that communist-backed candidates won by a landslide – see Betea, *Moartea unui lider comunist*, p. 115.
24. Levy, *Ana Pauker*, p. 138.
25. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*, p. 114.
26. Betea, *Moartea unui lider comunist*, pp. 175–6.
27. According to Levy, during the 1946 Peace Conference in Paris, Pătrășcanu, as one of the official Romanian representatives, did hold secret talks with the American delegation, being very disappointed by the weak position the Americans assumed toward the Soviets – see Levy, *Ana Pauker*, p. 139.
28. Betea, *Moartea unui lider comunist*, p. 242.
29. Levy, *Ana Pauker*, p. 143.
30. The fabricated conspiracy linked Pătrășcanu to another rival of Gheorghiu-Dej, the former party General Secretary Foriș. Allegedly, they led a group of traitors and spies with ties to the pre-1944 Romanian secret police and the American and British intelligence services. In a striking similarity with the Moscow show trials of the 1930s, the only proof consisted of 'confessions' extracted under torture.
31. Câmpeanu, *Ceașescu, anii numărătorii inverse*, p. 186.
32. Levy, *Ana Pauker*, p. 219.
33. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*, p. 132.
34. V. Tismaneanu, 'From Arrogance to Irrelevance: Avatars of Marxism in Romania', in R. Taras (ed.), *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Post-Communism in Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY, 1992), pp. 135–50 (here p. 149).
35. Two Politburo members, Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chisinevski, apparently inspired by Khrushchev's reforms in the Soviet Union, attempted to overthrow Gheorghiu-Dej and put the party on the path towards de-Stalinisation, but they were swiftly outmanoeuvred and demoted.
36. D. Deletant, *Romania Under Communist Rule*, 2nd ed. (Iași and Oxford, 1999), p. 103.
37. Răduică, *Crime în lupta pentru putere*.
38. Câmpeanu, *Ceașescu, anii numărătorii inverse*, pp. 238–9.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
40. Drăghici was never indicted for his actions, either by Ceașescu or by the post-1989 regime.
41. L. Constante, *Evadarea tăcută* (Bucharest, 2002), p. 202.
42. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*, p. 120.
43. Tismaneanu mentions one rehabilitation that took place in the 1950s, when Valter Roman, an associate of Ana Pauker who had been removed from a

- senior post in the Romanian military and expelled from the RCP in 1950 after being accused of being a 'Titoist' and 'western agent', was gradually restored to a position of seniority in the party between 1953 and 1956. But as he had never been put on trial or convicted of any criminal offence, his rehabilitation was purely political in nature and did not have any judicial consequences. See Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*, p. 285, n. 82.
44. For a detailed account, see D. Deletant, 'Political Purges and Mass Repression in Romania, 1948–1955', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 141–59.
 45. A. Marino, *Viața unui om singur* (Iași, 2010), p. 237.
 46. See Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, anii numărătorii inverse*, p. 185.
 47. On Ana Pauker we have the excellent analysis offered by Levy, *Ana Pauker*.
 48. Răduică, *Crime în lupta pentru putere*, p. 183.
 49. Another leader, deeply involved in the injustices of the Pătrășcanu trial, was appointed in 1969 as the Minister in charge of the Food Industry.
 50. C. Noica, *Becoming within Being* (Milwaukee, WI, 2009), p. 201.
 51. Adamson, 'Socialism, Revolution, and Transition', p. 117.

8

De-Stalinisation and Political Rehabilitations in Bulgaria

Jordan Baev

The former victims of Stalinist terror in Bulgaria fall into three main categories. The first group represented those anti-fascist Bulgarian political émigrés in the Soviet Union who were arrested and imprisoned during the years of the Great Terror (1936–1938). Those who survived returned home between 1944 and 1963, and many of them were quietly readmitted to the party. The second group represented the former leaders and functionaries of the anti-communist parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition of the immediate post-war years. A few of them were rehabilitated in the post-Stalin era after signing agreements to cooperate with the communists and as a result they were able to return to active public life. Most of the anti-communist opposition members, however, were only partially pardoned, which led to their further marginalisation from the system. The most ardent opposition leaders were officially rehabilitated only after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. The third group of former Stalinist victims represented communist functionaries who were accused, in a series of fabricated show trials in the late 1940s and early 1950s, of having spied for Tito's Yugoslavia and/or for the Americans and British.¹ Many of them were rehabilitated by special party and state commissions which functioned behind closed doors in the period 1956–1962.

Leaders of anti-communist Bulgarian emigration groups in Western Europe and North and South America in the early Cold War era represent a possible fourth case. The representatives of the post-1944 'western' political emigration varied from pro-Germans and ardent monarchists to confirmed democrats and republicans. Many of those who left Bulgaria between 1946 and 1949 were functionaries of the

right-wing of the Agrarian Union, a key opposition group in parliament led by Dr Georgi Dimitrov (who succeeded in fleeing the country in September 1945 with the support of the US mission in Sofia and was subsequently given a life sentence *in absentia*) and Nikola Petkov (who was executed after a fabricated trial in September 1947).² Several former diplomats also preferred to stay abroad when they were dismissed in 1947–1948, including the heads of the Bulgarian legations in Turkey, Switzerland, Britain and Sweden. All of the political émigrés were denounced as ‘enemies of the people’ and ‘traitors to the Motherland’, and received long prison sentences *in absentia*.

Documentary sources on these four groups can be found in the records of the Central Committee of the former Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and in the State Security archives, the latter now almost entirely declassified for the period up to 1990.³ In addition, there are about 60 works in print on the issue of rehabilitation of former victims of Stalinist repression in Bulgaria, including documentary volumes, memoirs, interviews and research monographs. Several periodicals, like the weekly *Pro and Contra* or the monthly magazine *A Testament*, have published material on this theme.⁴ Nonetheless, there is still no general overarching study of how the victims and their families experienced life after the Stalinist period. Before 1989, the rehabilitation process took place in secret, and was not exposed to public scrutiny or media coverage. Meanwhile, in the post-communist era, attention has been focused on the terror itself rather than on its aftermath, and, more controversially, on demands for the legal and political rehabilitation of ministers and officials of the former ‘bourgeois’ governments before the Fatherland Front coup of 9 September 1944, who were convicted of war crimes in a series of trials before the People’s Court between December 1944 and April 1945.⁵

This chapter starts with the period immediately following Stalin’s death in 1953. It will focus first on the rehabilitation of Bulgarian anti-fascists who were purged while in Soviet exile in the 1930s and 1940s. It will then move on to look at the rehabilitation of communist and non-communist victims of Bulgaria’s own Stalinist purges from 1948 to 1953. A third section examines the important years 1956 to 1961, when de-Stalinisation was temporarily halted in reaction to developments in Poland and Hungary, but then restarted, partly in response to the relaxation in Cold War tensions which preceded Khrushchev’s two-week state visit to the United States in September 1959. A final section looks at developments from the 1960s through to the late 1980s.

The fate of the Bulgarian political emigration group in the USSR

The Bulgarian anti-fascist emigration group in the USSR during the inter-war years suffered a devastating purge in its ranks. Of about 2,000 political émigrés (or 3,000 persons in total, if family members are included), 868 fell into the clutches of the NKVD, 579 of whom died. The first wave of arrests took place in 1929–1930; however, the years 1936–1938 marked the highpoint of mass terror against Bulgarian comrades. The personal records of Georgi Dimitrov, Secretary General of the Comintern from 1935 to 1943, and later leader of the BCP and Prime Minister of Bulgaria from 1946 to 1949, show that he interceded on behalf of at least 228 of his co-nationals, writing to Soviet courts, to prosecuting judges, NKVD chiefs, and even directly to Stalin, in order to plead their case. He also made representations on behalf of those who had been accused but not yet arrested. Between November 1937 and December 1948, Dimitrov supplied Soviet officials with at least 13 different lists of names of arrested Bulgarian political émigrés, along with requests for their release. He also made more than 50 repeat interventions on behalf of particular individuals, most of them being his close collaborators and comrades.⁶ Unbeknownst to him, several of the persons for whom he was still pleading in the late 1940s had been executed soon after their arrest in 1937–1938. Significantly, information about their fates had been kept hidden even from the then Secretary General of the Comintern.

One of the more fortunate cases was that of Ferdinand Kozovski (1892–1965), arrested during the night of 6 November 1938. On the following day, and again a week later, Dimitrov addressed two letters to NKVD boss Nikolai Yezhov, and in mid-December 1938 he appealed to Vsevolod Merkulov, deputy NKVD chief, requesting the release of his friend. Merkulov rejected his plea. However, once again in August 1939, Dimitrov categorically insisted in a letter to Yezhov's successor, Lavrentii Beria, that the accusations against the arrested Bulgarian were false. In November 1939, Kozovski was released from prison, a rare beneficiary of the vagaries of the Stalinist justice system. After returning home in September 1944, he made a career in the post-war years as Deputy Minister of Defence and Chairman of the Bulgarian parliament.

Another example is that of Dimitrov's co-defendant in the 1933 Leipzig 'Reichstag Fire' Trial in Nazi Germany, Blagoi Popov. He was arrested by the NKVD on 7 November 1937 at his home in Moscow, and in May 1939 was sentenced to 15 years' hard labour in the Siberian

Gulag. Meanwhile, his wife Riika divorced him under pressure from her influential father, Otto Kuusinen, the Finnish communist and Comintern official who later became Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) during the Khrushchev era (1957–1964). Popov served his 15-year sentence in full, and was only rehabilitated by a Soviet court on 17 March 1954, a year after Stalin's death. After returning home, he served in the Bulgarian foreign ministry as deputy head of one of its departments. In his memoirs, published in Paris in 1968, soon after his death,⁷ he returned several times to what was for him a very painful question: why had his 'comrade' Dimitrov not helped him? He never learned that Dimitrov had tried at least 15 times to secure his release (for instance, in correspondence with Soviet officials in December 1944; in May, September, and December 1945; in June and October 1946; and in April 1947). Dimitrov made similar efforts on behalf of other senior comrades in the Bulgarian anti-fascist emigration group, including David Isaakov (13 times), Nikola Popov (nine times)⁸ and Slavka Terzianova (eight times). However, they were released and given permission to return to Bulgaria only in 1954–1955.

Those Stalinist victims among the Bulgarian anti-fascist emigration who survived the Gulag and came home numbered around 150. Most of them returned in the immediate post-war period: 41 between late 1944 and the end of 1945, and 53 between 1946 and 1948. Only two or three per year were able to make the journey between 1949 and 1953, while 27 came back between 1954 and 1956, and 14 between 1957 and 1963.⁹ Usually the returnees received offers of minor government or public positions; and most had their party membership restored. In other words, they received a political and social rehabilitation of sorts. However, there was no moral rehabilitation in the sense of a public acknowledgement of the wrong done to them. Instead, there was an expectation on the part of the Soviet and Bulgarian authorities that they keep silent about their imprisonment in the USSR. A few of them left accounts of their time in Soviet exile, including their experiences in the Gulag, but these written memoirs were kept hidden away inside the party archive until the end of communist rule.¹⁰ Only in 1989 did the first survivor-memoir appear in print, that of Liliana Gevrenova. She spent 15 years in the Gulag merely on account of being the niece of Christian Rakovsky, a Bulgarian by origin, who was put on trial with Nikolai Bukharin in 1938 and shot in 1941.¹¹

During the period 1955–1958, alongside the release of the rest of the surviving victims, the Soviet authorities provided the BCP with what was still partly misleading information about several hundred

Bulgarian communists and members of the labour movement who had perished in NKVD prisons or in the Soviet Gulag. While the fact of their deaths was now acknowledged, the causes were carefully concealed. For example, information about the death of Georgi Andreichin (who was deported in 1928 to Kazakhstan because of his close relationship with Trotsky, then sent to the Gulag in Siberia in 1935–1941, and finally taken from his home in Sofia in 1949 and shot as an ‘American spy’ in Moscow in April 1950) was fabricated in August 1952.¹² For other victims, murdered in 1937–1938, the official Soviet reports falsely claimed that they had been killed by ‘Trotskyites’ or had died during the Second World War as a result of ‘enemy air raids’.

Soon after the 22nd Congress of the CPSU in October 1961, a plenary session of the Central Committee of the BCP established a special party commission, led by the man who had been party First Secretary since 1954, Todor Zhivkov, to examine documents recently received from Moscow about the purges against members of the Bulgarian leftist emigration in the USSR. Acting on behalf of the party commission, Zhivkov proposed a resolution on 17 July 1962, which was approved at a Politburo session on 2 August, for the full rehabilitation of ‘all repressed Bulgarian political émigrés in the Soviet Union’. Zhivkov also proposed that ‘all false and slanderous materials’ that were found inside the personal files of the repressed persons be destroyed, and that ‘the historical truth’ be reconstructed and publicised through national and local history projects, textbooks and museum exhibitions.¹³ However, due to ‘lack of detailed and reliable personal information’ and ‘the change in Soviet policy after 1964’, when Khrushchev was ousted and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev, the Politburo resolution could not be implemented in full. For almost three decades after the announcement of the official decision in favour of the rehabilitation of purged Bulgarian political émigrés in the Soviet Union, many of the actual facts were deliberately concealed in order to avoid doing anything to ‘offend the nature of the Soviet–Bulgarian friendship’. For instance, as in the USSR itself, rehabilitation was not granted to figures from the so-called ‘Trotsky–Zinoviev–Bukharin anti-party opposition’. Among those affected was the Bulgarian communist émigré Christian Rakovsky, who was Prime Minister of Soviet Ukraine and Soviet diplomatic representative in London and Paris in the 1920s, before being sent into internal exile in 1927. As one of the defendants in the third Moscow show trial in March 1938 (against Nikolai Bukharin and his associates), he was convicted of treason and shot in September 1941, but he was not officially rehabilitated by the Soviet Union until 1988. Only after this

were he and members of his family publicly acknowledged as victims in Bulgaria too.¹⁴

One final peculiarity in Bulgaria's response to the revelations about Stalinist terror in the Soviet Union was the publication of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's short novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in Sofia in early 1963. This was the first ever legal publication of the novel in a separate book edition in any of the Soviet bloc countries. The text of the book was taken from its journal version, which had first appeared in the Soviet literary magazine *Novyi mir* on 17 November 1962 with Khrushchev's special permission. The translation into Bulgarian was undertaken by the journalist Vencel Raichev, whose father-in-law, Georgi Andreichin, was, as we have seen, shot by Stalin's secret police in April 1950. The Bulgarian version was brought out by the prestigious publishing house Narodna Kultura with an initial print run of 30,000, and was never formally banned or removed from public libraries, even after the Khrushchev era came to an end in 1964.¹⁵ However, in November 1970, five prominent intellectuals were expelled from the BCP and the Union of Bulgarian Writers for refusing to sign a Soviet-inspired resolution condemning Solzhenitsyn after he was announced as a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. In the mid-1970s, over a decade on from the first appearance of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the exiled Bulgarian writer and dissident Georgi Markov declared in one of his famous *Reports in Absentia* for Radio Free Europe that across the Soviet bloc, 'Solzhenitsyn and the [positive] attitude towards him have become a badge of civic courage and morality.'¹⁶ In September 1978, Markov himself fell victim to a mysterious and successful attempt on his life when he was stabbed with a poisoned umbrella on Waterloo Bridge in London.¹⁷

Stalinist terror in Bulgaria and the initial 'Thaw' (1953–1956)

In Bulgaria, the mass purge of party members began in 1948 and reached a climax in 1949–1950. Over the entire period of Stalinist terror (1948–1953), almost 100,000 communist functionaries were secretly watched or investigated by the political police (State Security), and many were prosecuted for fictitious offences.¹⁸ The most prominent trial was that of Traicho Kostov, former Secretary of the BCP and Deputy Prime Minister, who was executed as an alleged 'Titoist' and 'British spy' on 16 December 1949.¹⁹ In the space of one year, 1,080 communist functionaries were accused of being Kostov's allies and therefore

'traitors' by association. On Stalin's direct orders, at the beginning of 1950, several prominent Bulgarian generals who had fought illegally as guerrilla commanders for the communists during the Second World War were also arrested. The spiral of terror led to denunciations and secret investigations of more and more senior figures in the party. Central Committee and even Politburo members were removed from office and placed at the centre of fresh conspiracies concocted by the secret police. Much of this activity took place at the instigation of special Soviet security 'advisers' in Bulgaria. The scale of the purges even alarmed the then General Secretary of the party and Prime Minister, Vulko Chervenkov, who managed to persuade Stalin to recall the MGB 'senior adviser' Stepan Filatov in mid-1951.²⁰ In retrospect, this proved to be something of a turning point.

Eventually several special party commissions, led by Politburo members, were set up to re-examine the police investigations conducted against some of the more obviously innocent communist victims. As a result, in 1951–1952, many of them were secretly released from prison, but without official political or legal rehabilitation.²¹ More ex-communists were freed from jail after the arrest of former NKVD chief Beria in June 1953, while many of the surviving defendants in the Kostov trial were pardoned following the improvement of relations between the Soviet bloc and Tito's Yugoslavia in June 1955. The last large group of so-called 'Traichokostovists' was released from prison in October 1955.²²

Stalin's death, Beria's arrest and the subsequent shift in Kremlin policy were also reflected in resolutions passed by the BCP Politburo on 4 July and 5 September 1953 concerning the pardoning of several hundred non-communist political prisoners convicted of 'counter-revolutionary activity'.²³ A special commission was established, headed by the chairman of the Bulgarian parliament and the Ministers of Foreign and Internal Affairs. Its main aim was to clarify the criteria and procedure for the release of several categories of political detainee. According to a secret report drawn up by the heads of the special commission on 21 August 1953, 858 prisoners had already been released from the Belene labour camp on 5 August after initial proposals had been accepted for granting them official pardons. A further 872 political prisoners, though, continued to be detained at the camp. They were divided into six categories, as follows: (1) government ministers under the old regime and leaders of the 'old bourgeois parties' (20 persons, 12 of whom were recommended for release); (2) former royalist officers in the pre-1944 army (118 persons, 29 of whom were proposed for

release); (3) police officers and state officials under the old regime (212 persons, 69 of whom were nominated for release); (4) suspected police informers accused of having betrayed the underground communist movement before 1944 (33 persons, seven of whom were proposed for release); (5) anarchists (17 persons, 12 of whom were put forward for release); and (6) former members of the right-wing of the Agrarian Union, 'Macedonian terrorists' and spies allegedly recruited by foreign intelligence services (472 persons, 390 of whom were selected for release).²⁴ In an additional report of 22 August 1953, the commission proposed that the practice of deporting and interning the families of convicted 'enemies of the people' be ended and that those currently in internal exile be allowed to return to their former places of residence. In September, following another parliamentary decree, a further 1,363 'counter-revolutionaries' were released from jail, so that the total number of pardoned prisoners now reached 2,885 persons. Finally, on 19 September 1953, General Georgi Tsankov, Minister of the Interior, announced the closure of 11 regional and local prisons and the notorious Belene labour camp.²⁵

As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, released prisoners, whether purged communists or persons identified with the anti-communist opposition, such as royalist officers, senior officials of the pre-1944 government or members of the Agrarian Union, continued to be considered as 'potentially dangerous persons'. As a result, they were subject to strict surveillance by the Security Service. However, there were some distinctions between different categories of former political prisoners. Several young leaders of the opposition faction of the Agrarian Union party, such as Petar Sarbinski, were allowed to join the Union's pro-communist wing and were appointed as senior officials in government departments and agencies. A typical example would be Vergil Dimov, who was Minister of Public Works (1932–1934) and of Internal Affairs (early September 1944) under the government of Konstantin Muraviev before it was overthrown by the Fatherland Front coup of 9 September 1944. After seven years in prison, Dimov agreed to sign a declaration that he would not act against the communist regime, and was released from prison in 1955. In 1957 he was elected to the Supreme Council of the Agrarian Union, which remained the smaller coalition partner in the communist-dominated government until 1990. A similar case was the daughter of one of the very popular leaders of the Agrarian Union, Rayko Daskalov (1886–1923). Svetla Daskalova was released from prison in 1952, later rising to become Deputy Chair of the Bulgarian parliament in the late 1950s, and Minister of Justice from 1966 to 1990.

The Khrushchev era and the rehabilitation of Bulgarian political prisoners

Soon after the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, at a secret meeting held in Moscow with leaders of the BCP, Khrushchev gave his approval to Anton Yugov's appointment as Bulgarian Prime Minister in place of Chervenkov. The latter had already ceded the position of party General Secretary to Zhivkov in March 1954, but nonetheless remained a key figure in the Politburo. At a plenary session of its Central Committee in early April 1956, the BCP approved a proposal for the establishment of a special party commission 'to inquire into the trials against Traicho Kostov' and other communist officials connected to the case. The special commission was headed by Central Committee and candidate Politburo member Dimitar Ganev, who would become chairman of the Bulgarian parliament two years later. The main task of the commission was to review all documentary and verbal evidence in the case against Kostov and his co-accused, in order to come to a decision on the four principal indictments: (1) Was there an organised anti-party and anti-government plot within the ranks of the BCP in the late 1940s?; (2) Did some of the accused work as agents or informers for the political police under the old regime?; (3) Did any of the arrested persons have secret contacts in western countries and were they involved in espionage?; and (4) Did any of the accused party and government officials conspire to commit acts of economic sabotage? The second task was to examine the original police methods used in the investigation and to consider whether those methods unfairly influenced the course and outcome of the trial.

During the next four months, the commission interviewed 86 witnesses, including the survivors among the accused and their torturers. In the course of 81 hearings, more than 1,400 pages of testimony were collected.²⁶ The members of the commission heard graphic accounts of the abuses and torture suffered by the victims after their arrests in 1949–1951. Among them were former ministers, Central Committee members, and guerrilla and armed resistance commanders from the Second World War era. Running parallel to this, members of the commission heard the testimony of former ministers and deputy ministers, State Security chiefs, police investigators and prosecutors. The strategy adopted by the chief representatives of the party, state administration and Security Services was to place the blame on former 'Soviet advisers' in Bulgaria who were now identified as having had close links with the 'unmasked criminals and traitors' Beria and his deputy Viktor

Abakumov. In this way, the Bulgarian officials – including former Prime Minister and party General Secretary Chervenkov, who was obliged to appear before the commission – attempted to avoid implicating themselves.

In early September 1956, the commission submitted a detailed report with proposals for the political and legal rehabilitation of almost all defendants arrested in connection with the Kostov trial. The proposed resolution was the subject of an animated discussion at a new plenary session of the Central Committee on 6–7 September 1956. The equivocal statement released by the Central Committee illustrates the limits to how far the party leadership was prepared to go in the de-Stalinisation process, and how far it was willing to take responsibility for abuses committed in the past. A typical example would be the qualifications in regard to Kostov himself. He was posthumously rehabilitated and acquitted of all charges of being a ‘police agent’ under the old regime, a ‘Titoist’ and a British spy. However, some of the other charges against him were upheld – for instance, ‘insincerity’ toward the communist leadership, ‘nationalist deviation’ and ‘anti-Soviet manifestations’. The only two prisoners who were not fully exonerated and were not allowed back into the party were Petar Semerdzhiev (former communist functionary and Central Committee member), due to documents proving his collaboration with the police in the 1930s, and Nikolai Zagorski (former head of one of the State Security departments), because of his ‘defeatist’ behaviour as a political émigré in France during the Second World War. Over the next two decades, Semerdzhiev became something of a dissident, expressing his opposition to certain BCP and Soviet bloc policies on several occasions (especially at the time of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968). In 1973 he managed to escape to Israel with his wife Emma Gueron, and later on became a leading commentator for the Bulgarian section of Radio Free Europe.

Among the last ‘Traichokostovists’ to be released from prison in April 1956 was Stefan Bogdanov, a former counter-intelligence chief in the State Security. Even while still in jail, he had addressed several letters of protest to his former friends and colleagues in the Central Committee and Politburo, insisting on his innocence and demanding full political and legal rehabilitation. Eventually, his party membership was restored. However, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as Deputy Director of National Cinematography, Director of the National Photographic Agency, and senior adviser to the Ministries of Agriculture and Foreign Trade, he continued to protest publicly against the government’s refusal

to uncover or investigate historic crimes committed by state and party officials during the Stalinist period. In 1968, under pressure from the Soviets, he was dismissed from his post as a commercial counsellor at the Bulgarian embassy in Berne and sent home in disgrace, after voicing criticism of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 1981, now aged over 70, he was arrested, interrogated and expelled from the BCP for a second time. Between then and his death in May 1986, he wrote his memoirs, which were published posthumously in 1991.²⁷

Meanwhile, several State Security torturers who had been involved in the Kostov trial and related miscarriages of justice were dismissed from the service and expelled from the BCP. However, only a few of them were prosecuted, receiving short prison sentences or spells in a labour camp. The largest group of State Security officers accused of 'violations of socialist legality' escaped real punishment and were merely given formal reprimands, while their bosses were censured politically and transferred to other state positions. For instance, former Minister of the Interior Rusi Hristozov was appointed head of the State Planning Committee, while his deputy Hristo Boev was sent to serve as Bulgarian Ambassador to Poland.

In April 1956, the government also made some overtures to political émigrés living in the west. Under Parliamentary Decree No. 104 a limited amnesty was announced for those former 'traitors to the Motherland' in the western world who had not committed 'serious crimes'. According to State Security reports, government officials had approached several close relatives of those émigrés with requests to 'advise' them to return back home.²⁸ These appeals were addressed not to ardent anti-communists, but in the main to young oppositionists who had fled the country illegally in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and to several former diplomats who had chosen not to return to Bulgaria after their dismissal from state service. The limited amnesty did not have any serious effect until the end of the 1950s. Over the next decade, a small number of Bulgarian political émigrés returned to their homeland. The most interesting case was that of the diplomat Nikola Antonov, who was Bulgarian representative at the League of Nations in Geneva in the mid-1930s, and then served in Moscow, Stockholm and Ankara until the end of 1948, when, after his dismissal, he preferred to go to the United States. However, in the late 1960s he suddenly established contacts with the Bulgarian embassy in Washington DC and in 1971 returned to Sofia, bringing with him his rich personal records.²⁹

The political upheavals in Poland and Hungary in late 1956 provoked a sharp reaction and the resumption of some repressive measures by the

communist regime in Bulgaria. The Belene labour camp was reopened, with the number of internees held there rising from 1,120 in early 1957 to 2,729 by June 1958. Most of them were labelled 'criminals', but a substantial minority were held for alleged political offences.³⁰ Although the commission established to review the cases of communists convicted of political offences was allowed to continue its work, the rehabilitation of non-communist prisoners was suspended for one to two years. Meanwhile, the Security Service resumed its fierce repression of 'hostile elements' from 'former bourgeois circles', using informants and threats of imprisonment or forced relocation as a means of crushing any sign of opposition. In short, the 'Thaw' of early 1956 began to turn into a renewed frost by the end of that year.

In August 1959, on the eve of Khrushchev's visit to the United States for talks with Eisenhower, Prime Minister Yugov declared in an interview with foreign journalists that there were no more labour camps in Bulgaria. Immediately after his statement, the Politburo passed a decree ordering the closure of the Belene labour camp for a second time. By 7 September 1959, all 276 prisoners accused of 'counter-revolutionary activity' had been released, together with 981 criminals. However, the state held on to a small number of 'recidivists', fewer than 200 in total, who had each served five separate jail terms or more. In order to cater for them, the Minister of the Interior, Georgi Tsankov, proposed the establishment of a new, smaller, secret labour camp near Lovech.³¹

Among the political prisoners released in 1959 were many leaders of the opposition wing of the Agrarian Union, as well as functionaries of the Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party, several oppositionist intellectuals, erstwhile senior royalist officers, and others. Most declared publicly that they did not intend to pursue any political activity. Many were suffering from severe health problems as a result of the harsh conditions they had experienced inside prisons and labour camps. In private conversations with friends, a few maintained their strong conviction that there was no freedom and democracy in communist Bulgaria and their belief that the situation could be changed only with the support of the western democracies.³²

An uncompromising position was adopted by several Agrarian Union functionaries toward the leaders of the leftist faction of their party, who had stayed in government with the communists during the purges against the anti-communist opposition in 1947–1948. After their release from prison, Ivan Jordanov, Luben Boyanov, Alexander Naydenov and others declared that they would henceforth collaborate with the communists and the state authorities, but 'never' with

their former comrades from the Agrarian Union. When in May 1961 Konstantin Muraviev held talks with the leader of the pro-communist wing of the Agrarian Union and first Deputy Prime Minister Georgi Traikov, other former Agrarian Union opposition leaders reacted very critically. Dimitar Gichev (a member of Muraviev's government in early September 1944) agreed with his close friend and relative Vergil Dimov that Konstantin Muraviev was a 'villain'.³³ Dimov likewise accused Muraviev of 'double-dealing' in his policy towards the Agrarian Union. At the same time, another former opposition leader, Angel Derzhanski (who had been a minister in the first pro-communist government in 1944–1945, but was sent to prison in 1948), declared to trusted friends:

The regime is trying to flirt with and incorporate Gichev and Muraviev. I do not know why those two persons in particular were selected for this purpose.... For us the evil is not the communists, but [the leader of the Agrarian Union] Georgi Traikov. I do not want to criticise the regime; they honoured me with a pension of 750 leva. I live a simple life without [political] ambitions; what I want is to be a respected person.³⁴

Though they were released from prison, former members of the 'bourgeois' opposition were not fully rehabilitated by the Supreme Court. In the early 1960s, some of them wrote memoirs (Vergil Dimov, Stoicho Mushanov and Konstantin Muraviev) without mentioning their prison or labour camp experiences. In this way, the regime maintained a form of discipline over them.

The last wave of rehabilitation in Bulgaria during the Khrushchev era was marked by the adoption on 8 September 1964 of a new special Amnesty Act, passed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the 'socialist revolution' on 9 September 1944.³⁵ The amnesty included nearly all political prisoners who had been arrested under the laws for the 'protection of the people's power' in the period 1944–1951. It also applied to almost all former functionaries of the right-wing of the Agrarian Union, which was banned in 1948. The new act included for the first time an amnesty (but not political or judicial rehabilitation) for those figures who had been sentenced in 1944–1945 for pre-war and wartime offences under the decree establishing a People's Court, with the exception of those who had ordered or carried out murders and other crimes in occupied territories in Yugoslavia and Greece during the war, and those who had fought against leftist partisan forces.³⁶

The political situation in Bulgaria from the mid-1960s to the 1980s

The removal of Khrushchev from power in October 1964 marked the end of de-Stalinisation across the Soviet bloc and led to a period of 'stagnation' under Brezhnev. The power shift in the Kremlin in turn provoked a short-lived military conspiracy in Sofia, undertaken by communist hardliners and representing the only example of a (failed) military coup in a Warsaw Pact country during the Cold War era. The secret plotting against Zhivkov started at the end of 1964 and spread to the middle ranks of the party in February-March 1965. After the arrest of the ringleaders, the conspiracy was explained to party activists as having been the work of pro-Stalinist and pro-Maoist elements. According to the subsequent State Security investigation, 105 persons with 'solid communist backgrounds' were directly involved in the plot against the regime. Among the organisers were some influential former communist guerrilla commanders during the Second World War. The plotters intended to act at the forthcoming Central Committee plenum, scheduled for 14 April 1965. However, their cover was blown and they were arrested a week before. After the conspiracy was revealed, more than 250 officers were discharged and another 192 BCP members received 'party penalties', while the most active organisers were sentenced to various terms in prison. At the plenary meeting of the Central Committee on 14 April, the plotters were unanimously denounced as 'pro-Chinese elements', while the principal conclusion of the Central Committee debate was that comrades had 'under-estimated' the influence of 'Chinese dogmatists and schismatics' inside the BCP.³⁷

In the second half of the 1960s, a handful of low-level party functionaries who opposed Zhivkov's personal rule were exposed and about 20–30 persons were sent to jail. After relatively weak protests against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 (in comparison with other East European countries), several hundred intellectuals were expelled from the BCP, some 'preventive measures' were taken to intimidate opposition-minded persons, and four students from the University of Sofia were imprisoned. As for the pro-Stalinists and 'revisionists' arrested in 1965, most were released from jail under another amnesty in September 1974, granted to mark the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the 'socialist revolution' in Bulgaria. Their release did not mean that they were rehabilitated politically, which happened only after the overthrow of Zhivkov in November 1989. During the party's nationalistic campaigns to force ethnic Turks in Bulgaria to swap Islamic

names for Christian ones (1984–1989),³⁸ the leaders of the Turkish opposition were imprisoned or interned in other regions of the country, while the most ardent dissidents of Turkish origin were even forced to emigrate to western Europe. They were also rehabilitated only after the fall of Zhivkov's regime.

The final wave of rehabilitations of Stalinist terror victims in communist Bulgaria came in the late 1980s, largely as a result of Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union. Combined with the pace of reform in Hungary and Poland, the fresh winds blowing in from Moscow encouraged the establishment of new, informal dissident groups in Bulgaria, some of which campaigned on behalf of former victims of Stalinist terror. For instance, on 10 February 1989 four former prisoners and activists of the right-wing of the Agrarian Union party addressed a letter to the Prime Minister, Georgi Atanasov, with an appeal for the political rehabilitation of their leader Nikola Petkov, executed by the communists in September 1947. The appeal was publicly announced on 15 March on Radio Free Europe by another Agrarian Union youth activist and former political prisoner, Todor Kavaldzhiev.³⁹ A similar appeal was launched on 18 May 1989 through an open letter addressed to Zhivkov. At the same time, a group of communist veterans, who established themselves as a pro-Gorbachev and anti-Stalinist 'internal dissident group' within the BCP, appealed to the party and state leadership for the full political and legal rehabilitation of Traicho Kostov.

A few weeks after the downfall of Zhivkov, which occurred on 10 November 1989, the new BCP leadership issued a resolution on 16 December 1989 calling for Kostov's unconditional rehabilitation. In the same month, opposition parties that had previously been banned under the communist regime were allowed to reform: the Social Democratic Party, the right-wing of the Agrarian Union, and the Radical Democratic and Democratic parties. On 15 January 1990, as a result of strong political pressure from these new movements, the Bulgarian parliament approved the full political rehabilitation of Petkov, Krastyu Pastuhov, Kosta Lulchev and other leaders of anti-communist opposition parties in 1945–1948.⁴⁰

In the meantime, in the last two years of communist rule, the process of reforms and liberalisation in Moscow also had a significant impact on attitudes towards, and the availability of information about, those Bulgarian communists who had perished during the purges in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s. The Soviet Supreme Court's decision in February 1988 to rehabilitate the leading figures from the so-called

'anti-party opposition' around Bukharin, including the Bulgarian Christian Rakovsky, put growing pressure on the authorities in Sofia to act. On 31 January 1989, the BCP Politburo adopted a special resolution calling for a review of all cases of Bulgarian political émigrés purged or imprisoned in the USSR.⁴¹ During the last personal meeting between Zhivkov and Gorbachev in Moscow on 23 June 1989 – and following an official request from the Bulgarian government to the Kremlin – the Soviet leader delivered about 600 pages of documents from the KGB and CPSU Central Committee archives with new information about the tragic fate of many Bulgarian anti-fascist political émigrés.

On 31 July 1989, the Chairman of the BCP Central Party Control Commission, Nacho Papazov, announced a detailed proposal for the full political rehabilitation of 361 repressed Bulgarian émigrés in the USSR, all of them legally rehabilitated by the Soviet authorities over the course of the previous 35 years. The group included 289 communists, 32 members of leftist youth organisations, seven members of the left-wing faction of the Agrarian Union, and 33 political exiles with no party affiliation. Besides their political rehabilitation, the proposal included financial compensation for the 25 victims who were still alive, and for 218 relatives (wives and children) of those who had died. On 29 August 1989, the Bulgarian Politburo approved the proposed rehabilitation measures, which were formally announced two weeks later by the BCP daily *Rabotnichesko delo*.⁴² However, even then, not all of the Bulgarian political émigrés were included, and after 1991, the families of those who had been left out were still seeking posthumous rehabilitation via the legal authorities of the Russian Federation – in some cases up to 50 or 60 years after their relatives' deaths and up to 15 years after the fall of communism.⁴³

Conclusion

De-Stalinisation in Bulgaria in the 1950s and early 1960s, and the accompanying rehabilitation of former victims of Stalinist terror, had lasting implications for those individuals and families who regained their liberty and, in some cases, their reputations. However, its political impact was temporary. For one thing, the new knowledge about Stalinist crimes did little to undermine the widespread pro-Russian feeling in the country or provoke the formation of significant opposition groups. Nor did it lead to major political changes at the top. In contrast to Hungary, where the reformer Imre Nagy played a key part in pushing forward the rehabilitation agenda, in Bulgaria the Stalinist Chervenkov

was only removed as Prime Minister in April 1956, and even after this he remained a member of the Politburo and a significant power behind the scenes until at least 1962.⁴⁴ Together with Zhivkov, his successor as party General Secretary in 1954, Chervenkov blocked demands for the full legal and political rehabilitation of Stalinist terror victims. In many ways, then, the Bulgarian case was similar to what happened in Czechoslovakia or East Germany, where the denunciation of the 'cult of personality' and reform of the old Stalinist political model was undertaken by the very same communist functionaries and leaders who had been responsible for the policy of mass repression and arrests of political opponents during the years 1948–1953.

After February 1956, rehabilitation Bulgarian-style continued to be characterised by much vacillation on the part of the BCP leadership. During periods of internal turmoil or external threat (for instance, at the time of the Hungarian uprising of October–November 1956 and again during the Prague Spring of 1968), it was halted or even put into reverse. At other times it was used as a means to strengthen the regime internally or externally, as seen, for instance, in the party's periodic attempts to co-opt former members of the opposition wing of the Agrarian Union or to coax moderate opponents into returning home from western exile. The result was a series of contradictory and half-hearted measures, including the partial rehabilitation of some of the communist and non-communist victims of the political terror between 1948 and 1953, and the complete exclusion of others from this process. True, to varying degrees in all East European countries, Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* created fresh opportunities for confronting the Stalinist past in the 1980s, but in the Bulgarian case, this was overshadowed by the move to crush opposition to the government's new anti-Turkish policies and by the ongoing influence of pro-Russian sentiment. An awareness of the real roots and causes of Stalinism, and the promulgation of measures designed to overcome its consequences, was therefore not possible until after the overthrow of communism in November 1989.

Notes

1. G. H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948–1954* (New York, 1987).
2. J. Baev, 'Stalinist Terror in Bulgaria, 1944–1956', in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 180–97 (here pp. 187–8).
3. All State Security documentary collections were declassified according to a Parliamentary Act of December 2006 and are currently held at the Central

Archives of the Special State Commission for State Security Dossiers (henceforth COMDOS).

4. Some of the testimonies, documentary volumes and scholarly publications can be found at three websites – <http://www.decommunization.org>, <http://www.minaloto.org> and <http://red.cas.bg>. See also J. Baev (ed.), *History of Bulgaria in the Cold War Era, 1945–1990: A Bibliography*, <http://www.coldwar.hu> (accessed 20 July 2014).
5. The matter remains unresolved and the question of political rehabilitation for Bulgaria's wartime leaders still causes controversy today.
6. J. Baev, 'Georgi Dimitrov I sadbata na bulgarskata politemigratsia v godinite na stalinskite represii', in Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (ed.), *Bulgaria v sferata na savetskite interesi* (Sofia, 1998), pp. 339–48.
7. Though the manuscript was held under lock and key at the Communist Party archives (Central State Archive (henceforth TsDA), Sofia, fond 321-B, opis 1, a.e. 48, 136 pages), several copies were distributed unofficially by two other repressed communist functionaries, Stefan Bogdanov and Petar Semerdzhiev. This is how the memoir was smuggled illegally to the west.
8. On 19 March 1948, a former personal secretary of Dimitrov and counsellor at the Bulgarian embassy in Moscow, S. Kolev, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sofia: 'All persistent intercessions of comrade Dimitrov for the release [of Nikola Popov] were rejected without any explanation. We applied at CC VKP(b), MOPR, and via diplomatic channels, but unsuccessfully.'
9. TsDA, fond 1-B, opis 68, a.e. 3735a, pp. 60–144; COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 66, opis 1, a.e. 162.
10. S. Tsvetanski, *Patevoditel po memoarnite dokumenti za BKP*, vol. 6 (Sofia, 2003) – TsDA, Sp 164-B, 1136-B, 2280-B, 2772-B, 2910-B, 2947-B, 2963-B, 3045-B.
11. L. Gevrenova, *Spomeni za moja vujcho Krastyu Rakovski* (Sofia, 1989).
12. See J. Baev and K. Grozev, *Odiseya v dva sviata* (Sofia, 2008). A revised, English-language version of the book (J. Baev and K. Grozev, *An Odyssey Across Two Worlds: George the Bulgarian and Soviet-American Relations During the First Half of the 20th Century*) was published online in January 2014 and can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.academia.edu>.
13. TsDA, fond 1-B, opis 6, a.e. 4879, pp. 25–7.
14. P. Panajotov, *Zhivotat I smurtta na Krasyyu Rakovski* (Sofia, 2003); M. Stanchev and G. Chernyavski, *Fars na krovi* (Kharkov, 1997).
15. According to several interviews with Vencel Raichev for the Bulgarian media in the 1990s.
16. G. Markov, *Zadochni reportazhi za Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1990), pp. 581 and 677.
17. During the investigations of Markov's murder in the 1990s, known publicly as the notorious 'Bulgarian Umbrella' case, the name of his killer, who acted on behalf of the Bulgarian State Security, was revealed – Francesco Gullino, aka *Piccadilly*, an Italian with Danish citizenship. However, to date, neither the Danish nor the British criminal police have tried to arrest him, despite the fact that he is still living in a small city in Austria. See T. Kelly, 'Did this Man Kill Cold War Spy Georgi Markov with an Umbrella?', *Daily Mail*, 22 March 2013.
18. Baev, 'Stalinist Terror', p. 192.
19. Hodos, *Show Trials*, p. 23. During the Kostov trial, Bulgarian state prosecutors even accused the head of the US legation in Sofia, Donald Heath, of

- involvement in the conspiracy. After Heath was declared *persona non grata*, the US broke off diplomatic relations with Bulgaria, and only restored them in March 1959.
20. Baev, 'Stalinist Terror', p. 186. Most probably General Filatov was recalled by Stalin because he was a close assistant to the Soviet Minister of State Security Viktor Abakumov, who was arrested in July 1951 (and eventually executed in 1954).
 21. TsDA, fond 1-B, opis 64, a.e. 94, 149, 161, 167.
 22. COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 1, opis 3, a.e. 61.
 23. P. Stoyanova and E. Iliev, *Politicheski opasni litsa* (Sofia, 1991), pp. 21–2 and 148–9.
 24. COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 1, opis 1, a.e. 3104, pp. 1–4.
 25. COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 23, opis 2, a.e. 1, pp. 19–20.
 26. TsDA, fond 1-B, opis 5, a.e. 219–26.
 27. St. Bogdanov, *Dve smarti nyama, a bez edna ne mozhe* (Sofia, 1991).
 28. COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 2, opis 1, a.e. 1175.
 29. According to his personal file, housed in the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry records in Sofia.
 30. Baev, 'Stalinist Terror', p. 194.
 31. COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 1, opis 7, a.e. 420, pp. 2–6.
 32. COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 13, opis 1, a.e. 1791, pp. 2–12.
 33. In June 1956, the communists tried to convince Gichev to sign an undertaking that he would collaborate with the regime in return for his release, but he refused and stayed in prison until August 1960. See TsDA, fond 378-B, opis 1, a.e. 1031, pp. 39–42.
 34. COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 13, opis 1, a.e. 1952, pp. 107–8.
 35. *State Gazette*, Sofia, no. 71, 8 September 1964.
 36. Not until after the end of communist rule, on 26 August 1996, did the Bulgarian Supreme Court decide in favour of the legal rehabilitation of the four Prime Ministers of the Second World War era (Bogdan Filov, Dobri Bozhilov, Ivan Bagryanov and Konstantin Muraviev); the members of their cabinets (1941–1944); two former Chiefs of General Staff of the Bulgarian Armed Forces (Generals Konstantin Lukash and Trifon Trifonov); and several close advisers of King Boris III. In January–February 1945, all of these officials had been tried, convicted, and – with the exception of Muraviev – sentenced to death by the People's Court in accordance with Articles 6 and 7 of the Armistice agreement with the Allied countries of 28 October 1944, which obliged the new Bulgarian government to 'place on trial persons accused of war crimes'. Convictions against a further 124 members of the 25th National Assembly (1940–1944) were also lifted by the Supreme Court in April 1996. However, in 1998, both the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Appeal decreed that sentences passed by the People's Court in 1944–1945 could only be overturned by an act of parliament, and to date the matter is still undecided. For further detail, see V. Todorov and N. Poppetrov (eds), *Sedmi sastav na Narodnia sud. Edno zakasnyalo dokumentalno svidetelstvo za antisemitizma v Bulgaria prez 1941–44* (Sofia, 2013), pp. 21–4.
 37. TsDA, fond 1-B, opis 34, a.e. 6; COMDOS, Record Group 'M', fond 1, opis 10, a.e. 104.

38. According to newly released archival records, that campaign was partly inspired by two psychological factors – fears that ‘a new Cyprus-like crisis’ might emerge in Bulgaria, and the appearance of several terrorist acts carried out by pro-Turkish nationalists against the civilian population in 1983–1984.
39. From 1997 to 2001, Kavaldzhiev served as Vice-President of Bulgaria.
40. *State Gazette*, Sofia, no. 6, 19 January 1990.
41. TsDA, fond 1-B, opis 68, a.e. 3581a, p. 2.
42. TsDA, fond 1-B, opis 68, a.e. 3735, pp. 2, 34–244; *Rabotnichesko delo*, no. 254, 11 September 1989, p. 1.
43. For instance, Stefan Arabadzhiev was rehabilitated in March 1992, Anton Hristov in July 1993, Petar Dimitrov in November 1995, Krastyo Angelov in March 2001 and Pavel Dimov in May 2004.
44. Baev, ‘Stalinist Terror’, p. 193.

9

The Rehabilitation of Stalin's Victims in Ukraine, 1953–1964: A Socio-Legal Perspective

Oleg Bazhan

The death of Josef Stalin on 5 March 1953, coming at a point of great tensions in the Cold War, accentuated the urgent necessity to modernise the ruling communist regime. The aspiration to reform the Stalinist system, to transform it into a more vital public organism, capable of reacting adequately to the challenges of the time, encouraged the new leaders to abandon terrorist methods, mass political repression and hypertrophied ideological control. The rejection of state terrorism by the political *nomenklatura* on the grounds that it was dysfunctional initiated a series of complex and contradictory attempts to modify the totalitarian structures of the Soviet Union, not least of which was the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinist terror. In this chapter, I shall show that the rehabilitation process in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was held back by a number of problems, some of them specific to Ukraine, and some of them relating to Soviet-wide barriers to the restitution of social and legal rights to all citizens (and foreign nationals) who had been wrongly deprived of their jobs, homes, property and liberty during the Stalin era. In particular, attention will be drawn to the paradoxes inherent in attempts to rehabilitate former members of the NKVD who had been both perpetrators and victims of the Stalinist terror system, and to the challenges presented by particular groups of deportees and prisoners hoping to return to Ukraine after being released from long spells in the Gulag or internal forced migration, including former members of the anti-communist Ukrainian national liberation movement arrested in the post-1944 period, and Crimean Tatars expelled from their homeland during the Second World War.

Amnesties in Ukrainian SSR, 1953–1955: course, scale and consequences

After 1953, an intense power struggle ensued among leading party representatives, as Stalin had left no designated successor. A short-term compromise was struck in the form of a so-called collective leadership, in which the key roles were played by Georgii Malenkov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikita Khrushchev, Secretary of the party's Central Committee, and Lavrentii Beria, Minister of Internal Affairs. One of Stalin's closest companions-in-arms, Beria attempted to break the unstable political balance and to strengthen his own position by undertaking the first steps towards the liberalisation of the public sphere and political life. In a memorandum addressed to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 26 March 1953, he informed his colleagues that Soviet prisons, colonies and corrective labour camps held a total of 2,526,402 inmates, including 22,145 persons considered to be dangerous.¹ Simultaneously, the Presidium was presented with the draft decree 'On Amnesty', which was approved on 27 March 1953 and published in the daily newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. According to the decree, 1.2 million people sentenced to five years' imprisonment or less were to be amnestied. Article 2 of the decree anticipated the release of all those convicted of economic and military crimes, regardless of the term of punishment. The decree covered pregnant women and women with children aged under ten; juveniles less than 18 years of age; men over 55 and women over 50 years of age, as well as persons who suffered from serious incurable diseases. However, the amnesty did not include those convicted of counter-revolutionary activities or anti-Soviet agitation.²

The publication of the decree met with a patchy response from the Ukrainian population. Along with expressions of approval for the actions of the Soviet government, some citizens noted certain negative aspects of the amnesty; for example, the categorical statement of intent to keep in force strict punitive measures against 'criminal-recidivists' or the proposals to establish probation periods for amnestied persons at construction sites. At agitational meetings held in enterprises, establishments and collective farms in the Kharkiv region, for example, there were cases of people expressing disappointment at the absence, in the regulatory document, of any reference to those who had been convicted on political grounds.³ Despite these contradictory popular reactions to the amnesty, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian party, L. Melnykov, in a letter to the Central Committee dated 1 April 1953, assured the Kremlin

of the positive attitude of wide sections of the republic to the actions of the government.⁴

On the basis of the 'On Amnesty' decree, the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice recommended that 69,921 persons should be released from camp colonies and corrective labour camps, including children's camps, located on Ukrainian territory. On 5 May 1953, Colonel Podobedov, chief of the First Special Department of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), confirmed that 19,892 persons had been liberated from prisons, corrective labour colonies and pre-trial detention centres.⁵ The majority were prisoners accused of hooliganism, speculation, theft and other economic crimes, but eventually a small number of those convicted of anti-Soviet agitation and family members of 'traitors to the Motherland' and Nazi accomplices were also included. By the end of May 1953, almost 70,000 inmates had been set free.⁶ However, additional tens of thousands of released prisoners returned to Ukraine from other parts of the Soviet Union: by 21 July 1953, 165,566 ex-convicts had been registered in the republic, most coming to the Donbas and its adjacent industrial regions. The figure had grown to over 172,000 by early August.⁷ The scaling down of the Gulag system and the release of its inmates, both launched soon after Stalin's death, continued with a series of governmental decrees in the years 1954 and 1955 and with the re-examination of cases against persons convicted of counter-revolutionary crimes. According to the Ukrainian MVD, between 1953 and 1955 over 330,000 people arrived in cities and villages from places of confinement and correctional facilities.⁸

The logistics of the amnesty process were undertaken mainly by camp administrations at the place of confinement. They passed injunctions, which were approved by the regional public prosecutor, for all amnestied individuals: each received a certificate of release and permission to settle in a new place of residence. Moreover, the amnestied were provided with travel documents at the expense of the camp authorities (except for those with 'no right to leave', who were allowed to live outside the camps but were obliged to remain in exile or at least away from major settlements in the western parts of the Soviet Union for years, sometimes decades after their release). This complex arrangement involved many camp employees, who, together with railway administrators and militia officers, organised the departure of ex-prisoners, avoiding crowding and disruption at railway stations and water quays. As archival documents certify, the social adaptation of hundreds of thousands of former convicts was far from easy, often because central and local authorities underestimated the sheer volume of work and preparation that was required.

In the capital city, Kiev, some militia departments, invoking spurious loopholes, refused to register the released.⁹ Similar issues arose in the provinces, specifically relating to the registration of juveniles. Despite the deficit in the labour force, directors of enterprises and establishments categorically refused to employ amnestied persons, and hence by June 1953, only 108,224 of registered ex-prisoners (74.8 per cent of the total number) had found gainful employment.¹⁰ As late as February 1956, 22,813 amnestants were still unemployed and were thus under the purview of militia authorities and employment departments of regional councils.¹¹

Another major bone of contention was the confiscation of property. Following the amnesty of March 1953, the number of petitions from ex-prisoners requesting the return of confiscated property significantly increased. Prior to the amnesty, such petitions had been sent to the Presidium of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet on an individual basis, but after promulgation of the decree, their number mushroomed to approximately 300–350 per month. Most were rejected on the grounds that confiscation was a *fait accompli*. Only in relatively few cases – when confiscation was still pending and when families of an amnestant could demonstrate gross social deprivation by the seizure of property – were confiscation orders cancelled. Ex-convicts also petitioned the authorities to free them from payment of the financial losses caused to state enterprises and other public organisations by their release, but most requests suffered the same fate – they were, as a rule, rejected.¹²

A most unwelcome outcome of these financial and social burdens was that some of the amnestied turned to criminal activity. Official statistics testify that 6,696 crimes were registered in Ukraine between 1 April and 20 June 1953. Of these, 1,196 crimes (17.9 per cent) were committed by amnestied persons, and 1,383 individuals were prosecuted as a result. Most of these crimes were observed in Kiev and in the Stalin, Voroshilovgrad, Zaporozhe and Odessa regions.¹³ The rising crime rate among the amnestied was an ongoing problem for the Ukrainian authorities, as witnessed by a letter from the Deputy Head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, B. Shulzhenko, to the First Secretary of the Ukrainian party, O. Kyrychenko, on 1 February 1956. Shulzhenko expressed concern about the fate of amnestied people, many of whom were treated with indifference, even rudeness, by enterprise managers and other officials, who regularly refused to offer them employment. The resultant dissatisfaction and exasperation meant that some turned to crime: 'According to data compiled by the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, 49,994 persons ... released from places of confinement during 1953–1955 have been re-arrested, including 592 persons for

murder, 2,636 for banditry and robbery, 16,619 for various thefts, and 16,260 for speculation and other crimes.' The highest numbers of recidivist criminal offences were in the Stalin and Voroshilovgrad regions: 9,891 people in the former and 4,049 in the latter.¹⁴

Unacceptably high crime levels and relatively low rates of employment among ex-prisoners induced the Ukrainian Council of Ministers to adopt the decree 'On the Removal of Shortcomings in the Employment of Amnestied Citizens', issued on 6 June 1953. In doing so, the government paid attention to the disappointing statistics emanating from the Mykolayiv and Volyn regions, where only 55 per cent of amnestied people were employed. Figures in other areas were only slightly better: 58 per cent in Voroshilovgrad and Dnipropetrovsk, 62 per cent in Sumy, 65 per cent in Chernihiv and 66 per cent in Odessa. In response to this, the Ukrainian Council of Ministers obliged directors of enterprises and construction sites to recruit, without fail, people discharged from imprisonment, and to provide them with requisite accommodation and living conditions. The Ukrainian judicial authorities were ordered to monitor the observance of these directives. In order to accelerate the adaptation process for amnestied citizens, executive committees of district and city councils sponsored 'study circles' for persons who had been unable to find regular work, and employees of passport offices acquainted them with lists of vacant positions at local enterprises. Thanks to these actions taken by the Ukrainian government, by 1 September 1953, 86 per cent of the 169,000 amnestied were employed, over 76,000 of them in the main cities.¹⁵

An acutely sensitive subject was the release of those sentenced for collaboration with the wartime Nazi invaders. This issue was first officially broached by the decree of the Supreme Soviet on 17 September 1955, 'On the Amnesty of Soviet Citizens who Collaborated with the Occupiers during the Great Patriotic War', which created quite a stir within Ukrainian society. The resolution affected 1,818 prisoners in Ukraine with convictions for serving in the German army, security police and special military groups. By 20 October 1955, slightly over 800 had been released from the camps, colonies and prisons of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, and a further 150 collaborators had had their sentences reduced.¹⁶ The arrival of former village elders, policemen and Nazi accomplices resulted in a veritable wave of popular anger. In the autumn of 1955, it was reported that a number of the amnestied had been beaten and their houses set on fire. Other material damage had been inflicted and local authorities were refusing to employ the returnees.

It is extremely difficult to calculate the exact number of people convicted of collaboration who returned to Ukraine from the Gulag under the terms of the Supreme Soviet order of 17 September 1955. Documents located in the First Special Department of the Ukrainian MVD, a body whose main task during the Khrushchev 'Thaw' was to resolve issues affecting these 'special' residents, contain information about the return of wartime collaborators to territories in western Ukraine. On 1 January 1961, it was reported that 6,824 people (Nazi accomplices and those who had served in fascist armies) had settled in the Volyn, Zakarpattia, Lviv, Stanislav, Ternopil and Chernivtsy regions after their release from imprisonment, 4,679 of whom were now employed in industrial jobs.¹⁷

In sum, the amnesties implemented during the initial period of de-Stalinisation had both positive and negative socio-political consequences. On the one hand, the release of certain categories of ex-prisoners from the threat of further punishment and criminal proceedings strengthened the authority of the post-Stalinist leadership. On the other hand, the act of amnesty did not, in my estimation, significantly reduce the existing antagonisms in state-society relations. Rather, the social re-assimilation of large numbers of amnestied people into Ukrainian society was complex, contradictory and long drawn-out, as the evidence cited above suggests.

The rehabilitation process in Ukraine: prerequisites, stages and peculiarities

The process of large-scale rehabilitation, as opposed to amnesty, started in September 1953 when the Soviet Supreme Court, following interventions from the General Prosecutor, was granted the right to re-examine the judgements of the former collegiums of the State Political Directorate (GPU – secret police), *troikas* and NKVD 'special councils'. Unsurprisingly, given the tensions inside the political leadership of the country, the first reviews and revisions were cautious: rehabilitation only affected certain party and state luminaries and their families. But by May 1954, the release of illegally repressed citizens and foreign nationals began to acquire a relatively mass character with the adoption of the decree by the USSR Council of Ministers, 'On the Re-examination of Criminal Cases of Persons Convicted of Counter-Revolutionary Offences'. The decree anticipated the establishment of central and local commissions which would be granted the right and power to undertake rehabilitation and release prisoners directly at their places of confinement.¹⁸ Ukrainian territorial and regional commissions were entrusted

with the re-examination of cases of persons repressed by local NKVD *troikas*, as well as special courts, and the decisions of the central and local commissions regarding these extra-judicial bodies were considered final. The revision of cases against persons convicted by judicial or extra-judicial bodies was generally carried out by the appropriate legal authorities in the wake of applications by local prosecutors.¹⁹ The Ukrainian commission included M. Pidgornii, Secretary of the Central Committee, D. Panasiiuk, the republican prosecutor, and I. Golynnyy, a departmental deputy head and member of the Central Committee.²⁰ As a result of the activities of 26 regional commissions, the Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office and Supreme Court, and various district military courts, approximately 15,000 illegally repressed citizens were released in the period from 1953 to early 1956, of whom 1,801 were fully rehabilitated.²¹

As is well known, an important milestone in the rehabilitation process, both in the USSR as a whole and in Ukraine, was the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in late February 1956. Following Khrushchev's unprecedented attack on key aspects of Stalin's terror, legal and public rehabilitation was extended to several leading Ukrainian party, state, military and cultural figures who had been unjustly repressed: S. Kosior, M. Kulish, P. Postyshev and I. Yakir, among others. Many lower-ranking communists were also rehabilitated and had their party membership restored. In the years 1956–1961, party control commissions and regional and territorial committees throughout the Soviet Union rehabilitated 31,000 communists, including 3,693 former executive party and Komsomol workers, 4,148 Soviet officials, 6,165 economic functionaries, and 4,394 commanders and political workers in the army and navy.²² Furthermore, within three months of the 20th Congress, decrees were passed by the USSR Council of Ministers and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet releasing and rehabilitating large numbers of former convicts: deportees, family members of Ukrainian and Belorussian nationalists and 'political criminals'. In total, during the period 1956–1959, around 250,000 people²³ were rehabilitated in Ukraine, most of them posthumously, and tens of thousands of Gulag prisoners were returned to their native homes.

The KGB and mass rehabilitation campaigns for victims of political repression

It should be recognised, however, that many top party-state officials regarded de-Stalinisation and the entire rehabilitation process as acutely troubling. In particular, Ivan Serov, chairman of the renamed Committee

for State Security (KGB), considered the advent of de-Stalinisation measures not a crucial overhaul of the Soviet order, but merely a limited set of actions directed at removing the most grotesque abuses of the totalitarian system. In a letter dated 1 April 1957 to General Prosecutor Rudenko, Serov suggested that judicial reviews should be restricted to cases from 1937–1938, and no other period. He insisted that ‘a number of undesired consequences of a political, legal and economic character’ would result from large-scale revisions, not least the fact that ‘real enemies’ of the Soviet state could be rehabilitated. Moreover, those ‘wrongly’ rehabilitated would receive compensation for the cost of property confiscated by the state and could be granted various rights and privileges attendant on rehabilitation.²⁴ Serov’s argumentation harked back to the Stalinist 1930s and, supported by his subordinates in the KGB, served to delay the rehabilitation process, clearly displaying its incompleteness and limited horizons.

Nevertheless, in the years 1953–1955, Serov and his ilk could not prevent ongoing investigations into the activities of the security organs, many of which revealed blatant infringements of legality. These overt irregularities were often brought to the attention of the law enforcement bodies on the orders of the Soviet Minister of Internal Affairs. One such directive, dated 1 April 1953, was signed by Beria himself and stated that the MVD had established the existence of serious breaches of the law, such as large-scale falsification of evidence and the widespread use of torture, as well as the arrest of innocent Soviet citizens. The order anticipated the categorical prohibition of ‘physical methods’ and raised the possibility of the criminal prosecution of perpetrators of torture.²⁵ These examinations, even ‘purges’, of the organs of internal affairs and state security were also carried out on the initiative of the party-state authorities. For example, in February 1954, the USSR Council of Ministers recommended that the MVD establish a special commission to assess the statement of A. Dedov, a former ministry employee, who had provided factual evidence on the unwarranted arrest of citizens, and on errors in the selection and appointment of security staff.²⁶ Across the USSR, 18,000 employees were dismissed from the KGB in the period March 1954 to June 1957 as a result of such investigations, including 2,300 for infringements of Soviet legality, abuse of official position and amoral deeds.²⁷ Between May 1954 and March 1956, tens of Ukrainian secret service officers were brought to justice for falsifying investigative materials and applying physical force to the arrested. Of them, 15 were subject to disciplinary measures, three to criminal charges and eight were dismissed from the KGB.²⁸

At the same time, the implementation of party decisions, notably the Central Committee decree of 19 January 1955, 'On Further Actions for the Consolidation of Socialist Legality', was delayed by covert resistance on the part of KGB operatives. Interestingly, an internal report from the summer of 1959 provides some insight into the obfuscation and stalling tactics adopted by certain KGB departments and employees:

Several registration offices of the KGB, special departments and transport agencies still delay the examination of applications and complaints, adopt superficial and formal attitudes in their work, and refuse unjustifiably to meet the legitimate property claims of rehabilitated citizens or their relatives. When considering citizens' applications on property issues, some organs of the KGB, instead of conducting investigations into why rehabilitated persons have lost property, all too often reject their petitions because of a lack of relevant documents or for other formal reasons.²⁹

Paradoxes in the rehabilitation of Cheka-NKVD operatives

Even today, we have no exact figures on the number of state security operatives repressed under Stalin. In 1988, the chairman of the Ukrainian KGB, M. Golushko, declared that during the Great Terror, 'a total of 1,199 executive workers of the Ukrainian People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs [NKVD], who had borne the burden of struggle during the Civil War and were faithful warriors of the party, perished'.³⁰ He did not, however, specify the number of repressed Chekists who had directly engaged in the illegal purges of 1937–1938. As for the organisers of terror, the so-called 'Yezhovites', there is still the mistaken belief that they received their just desserts for crimes against Soviet citizens. It is true that in 1939–1941, some lower-ranking Chekists were convicted for infringements of socialist legality. However, the overwhelming majority of the NKVD victims of the purges were condemned not for falsifying criminal cases, but for participating in mythical anti-Soviet plots against the ruling Stalinist clique. Hence, the rehabilitation of infamous Chekists during the 'Thaw' often had a dubious character, both from the legal and moral point of view. Figures who themselves had been heavily implicated in the Great Terror, such as K. M. Karlson and Z. B. Katsnelson, former deputies of the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, and P. G. Sokolov-Shostak, ex-head of the Counter-intelligence Department of the Ukrainian NKVD, together with hundreds of other secret police functionaries, were posthumously

rehabilitated at the climax of the rehabilitation campaign for victims of Stalinist repression.³¹

It appears that during the 'Thaw', there were no standard legal procedures for quashing the convictions of perpetrators of the Great Terror. On occasion, there were even disagreements among judicial representatives when assessing the guilt of a given person involved in a criminal case. So, for example, when in the 1950s the former Major of State Security Ya. Z. Kaminskii submitted a petition for rehabilitation (having been sentenced to eight years' imprisonment in 1938) the chairman of the Kiev Military District (KMD) court, General-Major Arkhypovych, tried to have him recognised as criminally responsible for infringing socialist legality. The reasoning was based on an investigation that eloquently testified to the fact that 'Kaminskii ... performed arrests, personally interrogated prisoners and was involved in the falsification of investigative materials [as a result of which] many persons were repressed'. However, the military prosecutor of the KMD, General-Major I. Budargin, rejected Arkhypovych's arguments as 'insufficient' and Kaminskii was duly rehabilitated.³²

It is well known that during the Stalinist mass repressions, extra-judicial bodies were created at the regional level, the so-called *troikas*; these were composed of the local NKVD Head of Department, the First Secretary of the local party committee and the regional prosecutor. Often, members of the *troika* themselves later became victims of the Stalinist terror system. It is noteworthy that during the rehabilitation campaigns after the 20th Congress many prosecutors and party secretaries, despite having participated in the Stalinist 'conveyor belt of death', had their 'good name' restored and a few were even given posthumous honours. Yet other leading figures in the NKVD were not so fortunate, some being portrayed as the truly culpable ones who had committed terrible crimes or breaches of socialist legality at Stalin's bequest. The investigation of Isak Shapiro – a top state security official and member of the *troika* in the Kiev region in 1938 – reflects the dual nature of Khrushchev's 'Thaw'. In 1957, the prosecutor's office of the Kiev Military District determined that Shapiro and other former NKVD agents had committed gross infringements of Soviet legality, as a result of which innocent people had been executed; however, the case was dismissed, citing the statute of limitations. Nevertheless, on 30 May 1958, the bureau of the Kiev regional committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party decided to expel Shapiro from the party 'for breaching socialist legality and groundlessly convicting large numbers of people in 1938'.³³

'The Case against I. Shapiro' indicates that the purge of the state security organs during the 'Thaw' touched only the most notorious commanders of the Great Terror. The majority of security officers justified their criminal activities by arguing that they had been merely following orders and directives 'from above', and as a rule their punishment as 'intentional violators of socialist legality' was less severe – loss of position, transfer to another job, expulsion from the party. That such self-serving excuses could influence the attitude of party and state representatives towards those who had perpetrated the mass terror of the 1930s and beyond testifies to the unwillingness of Khrushchev and his entourage to fully confront the 'blank spots' of Soviet totalitarianism.

Peculiarities in the rehabilitation of inhabitants of Western Ukraine

Some party leaders believed, and feared, that the release and rehabilitation of Stalinist victims would strengthen oppositional tendencies in Ukraine. They were particularly concerned about the liberation and return of deported members of the anti-communist Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which was active from the 1940s to the early 1950s. Between 1944 and 1952, 203,662 persons had been deported to remote districts of the Soviet Union, including 182,543 participants in the OUN, their followers and family members.³⁴ Family members of the so-called Ukrainian and Belorussian nationalists were released from deportation under the terms of the Council of Ministers' decree of 15 May 1956. In 1961, deportation restrictions were lifted on those 'former participants in the nationalist underground and armed nationalist gangs' convicted for actions committed while under the age of 18. Similarly, 'supporters, former heads and participants of the nationalist underground and armed nationalist gangs' were released from deportation according to decrees issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet dated 19 May 1958, 7 January 1960 and 6 December 1963. These categories of deportees were permitted to return to their original places of residence only with the approval of regional soviets, but the established rules were often infringed.³⁵ For instance, at the beginning of the 1970s, approximately 60,000 ex-deportees relocated to the western regions of Ukraine without prior permission from the local authorities.³⁶

As the top echelons of power predicted, the return of a significant number of deportees to the western regions of Ukraine reinforced oppositional tendencies in the area. The Secretary of the Stanislav regional

party committee, P. Shcherbak, informed his political bosses in Kiev of several cases in which former 'nationalists', having returned from the camps, tried to renew their lost contacts and continue their anti-Soviet activity.³⁷ This situation made the Ukrainian party leaders more determined to implement a range of preventative measures, first mooted at a meeting on 3 January 1957, which anticipated the transportation and distribution of former deportees to eastern districts of the republic and even their return to the Gulag and other places of deportation.³⁸ On 11 October 1958, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party appealed to Moscow to criminalise such 'anti-Soviet' activities.³⁹ Likewise, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian party, Pidgornii, persuaded Khrushchev to bolster the decree passed by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on 9 November 1956 prohibiting former activists of the Ukrainian nationalist underground from returning to the western regions of the republic.⁴⁰

Thus, the liberation of Ukrainian nationalists and their supporters was a very slow and partial process. The cases of deportees were re-examined only 'on an individual basis' and, following their return to the Motherland, the families of participants in the Ukrainian nationalist movement experienced various forms of official discrimination. Released prisoners were not entitled to reclaim confiscated property or receive pensions, and they were barred from certain forms of employment.

Crimean Tatars: the twisted road to rehabilitation

At the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, the Crimean Tatars, who like several other Caucasian peoples had been forcibly deported during the Second World War, held out hope for liberation. Declarations by Soviet leaders and documents adopted by the party and government gave some grounds for optimism. In particular, at the 20th Congress, Khrushchev had for the first time openly condemned the wartime mass deportations of nations as shameful and irrational. However, several aspects of the Soviet leader's speech elicited concerns among democratically inclined sections of society. For example, having described in detail the tragic fate of the Karachai, Kalmyk, Chechen, Ingush and Balkarian peoples, Khrushchev omitted to mention the victimisation of the Crimean Tatars. The omission probably reflected the deep divisions at the apex of political power on key issues related to the fate of the repressed peoples. This lack of consensus was also evident in the content of a decree passed by the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet

on 28 April 1956, 'On Removing Restrictions on the Special Settlement of the Crimean Tatars.... Relocated during the Great Patriotic War'.⁴¹ Although the directive stipulated the de-registration of the deportees and their release from administrative supervision, they were deprived of the right to compensation for confiscated property, and – most importantly and painfully for the victims – they were barred from returning to their historical homelands.

Consequently, hundreds of Crimean Tatars resident in Uzbekistan and other Soviet republics openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the Supreme Court decision and insisted that significant changes should be inserted into the decree. Many categorically refused to acknowledge the terms of the ruling, and 233 individuals formally requested the return of confiscated properties and the right to enter Crimea.⁴² The initial response to these claims was the decree of the Soviet Presidium issued on 24 November 1956, which stated, *inter alia*:

in light of the fact that the former Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic [ASSR] was not only composed of Tatars but constituted a multinational republic in which Tatars represented less than one fifth of the entire population, it is inexpedient to grant national autonomy to the Crimean Tatars.... Nevertheless, taking into consideration the aspirations of some former Crimean Tatars for national unity, it is recognised that *all who wish* have the right to settle in the territory of the Tatar ASSR.⁴³

Thus, the November 1956 decree completely rejected the self-determination of the Crimean Tatars and their right to national autonomy. Moreover, the restriction on Crimean Tatars settling in Crimea was extended to other regions of Ukraine. On 15 December 1956, the Ukrainian Council of Ministers decided that the deported Crimean Tatars, Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians and Armenians should not be permitted to relocate to the Kherson, Zaporozhe, Mykolayiv and Odessa regions.⁴⁴ However, regardless of the deficiencies and contradictory nature of these decrees, they did attract the attention of the wider community to the unresolved problems of the Crimean Tatars and helped to consolidate the emergence of the Tatar national movement. As a result, in the mid-1950s, the struggle of the Crimean Tatars for the return of their historic homeland acquired more significant and organised forms. Even those Crimean Tatars who were loyal to the regime, such as Old Bolsheviks and veterans of the Civil and Great Patriotic Wars, did not give up the fight. Their representatives, visiting Moscow in the summer

of 1956, insisted on being received by the Central Committee and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, but despite their best efforts, the mission turned out to be unsuccessful.

In September 1956, a group of communists made up of former party and government workers of the Crimean ASSR wrote to Presidium member Mikhail Suslov, urging him to consider the issue of the Crimean Tatars in line with the decisions of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and Lenin's original emancipatory approach to the nationalities question. The authors of the letter decisively condemned the practice of MVD officials, who were demanding that all Crimean Tatars should renounce in writing their right to return to Crimea and to reclaim their former properties. These and other actions by veterans of the revolutionary movement and by Crimean Tatar intellectuals and youth spurred a mass campaign of protest in the second half of the 1950s. In particular, in 1957, activists of the Crimean Tatar national movement prepared and sent a collective application, signed by 14,000 of their compatriots, to the Central Committee.⁴⁵ Simultaneously over 10,000 individual appeals requesting the restoration of justice to the Crimean Tatars were dispatched to the top political leaders of the country. But the petition drive, essentially ignored by those in power, came to naught, causing disillusionment among Crimean Tatars and raising doubts that their problems could ever be resolved. The result was a partial scaling back of the campaign and a reduction in the number of collective and individual applications addressed to leading party and state bodies.

However, Khrushchev's removal from power in October 1964, which active members of the movement blamed partly – not without reason – on his ignorance of the acute problems of the Crimean Tatars, brought to life a further wave of protests. These actions eventually had a measure of success. On 5 September 1967, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, in an attempt to ameliorate the negative mood among Crimean Tatars, passed a resolution quashing the Stalinist charge of Tatar treason during the Second World War. At the same time, the Presidium adopted a decree asserting the right of citizens of Tatar nationality, like all citizens of the USSR, to reside in the territory of the Soviet Union, assuming that they abided by the provisions of existing employment legislation and the internal passport regime. However, what was presented as an end to discrimination and an effort to equalise relations among the peoples of the USSR in practice curtailed the resettlement rights of the Crimean Tatars once again, this time in line with the notorious 'residence permit' (*propiska*), which artificially restricted the free movement of all Soviet citizens.

Conclusion

The rehabilitation process undertaken in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and early 1960s had a rather limited and indefinite character. Most of those convicted of political 'crimes' did not receive complete rehabilitation, and their rights (re-employment at former places of work, return of confiscated property, compensation for material losses) were not realised in full. Although many of those purged in the late 1930s had their sentences reviewed and revised (including a not inconsiderable number of former NKVD officials who had themselves been part of the terror system before their arrest), the criminal cases of persons involved in the fabricated political trials of the late 1920s and early 1930s, nationalist activists, party leaders and intellectuals repressed due to accusations of 'Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism', were not subject to re-examination. A whole series of party and Supreme Soviet decrees issued in the years 1954 to 1967 failed to meet the hopes of the repressed peoples, notably the Crimean Tatars. Indeed, the entire rehabilitation process was effectively halted in the early 1960s, the number of re-examined cases was reduced annually and revisions were undertaken only on the basis of individual applications by citizens or their relatives.

Notes

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11. TsGAGOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4307, l. 4.
12. TsGAGOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 2832, ll. 31–2.
13. *Ibid.*, ll. 14, 17, 31; d. 3123, ll. 30–1.
14. TsGAGOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4307, ll. 1–3.
15. TsGAGOU, f. 2, op. 8, d. 9718, ll. 127–8.
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17. Departmental State Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, f. 15, op. 1, d. 121, l. 39.
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36. *Ibid.*, l. 38.
37. TsGAGOU, f. 1, op. 25, d. 4087, l. 430.
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10

The Fate of Stalinist Victims in Moldavia after 1953: Amnesty, Pardon and the Long Road to Rehabilitation

Igor Cașu

The fate of the victims of political repression and mass terror under Stalin (and Lenin) is an under-researched topic in Moldovan and post-Soviet historiography. The theme is important not only *per se* in that it focuses on the fate of millions of citizens who, in their vast majority, had committed no criminal acts and broken no laws. In the larger context, it is about the very nature of the communist regime, the way it tried to reform itself after Stalin's death and to empower, to a certain degree, those previously criminalised and marginalised categories of the population who had been persecuted on ideological grounds. The subject is also connected to the broader issue of the limits of de-Stalinisation – to what extent did post-1953 Soviet rule mark a rupture with the Stalin years?¹ This chapter is structured thematically rather than chronologically. In the first part, I examine the rehabilitation of party, state and secret police officials who had fallen victim to the regime in various periods of Soviet history. The second part concentrates on the victims of mass terror, mainly related to the three deportations from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) in mid-June 1941, early July 1949 and early April 1951. In the third part, I assess the amnesty or rehabilitation of individuals condemned in the late 1940s for collaborating with the occupying German and Romanian war administrations, including war criminals involved in the mass killing of the local population, notably Jews during the Holocaust. Finally, I discuss the fate of several key perpetrators of Stalinist crimes in Moldavia. Other important issues cannot be dealt with in this chapter: for example, the exact number of Gulag returnees who were permitted and chose to return to their home localities and who were able to reclaim their lost properties.

By way of introduction, a few remarks are in order, first on geography and second on terminology. The Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist

Republic (MASSR) was created in October 1924 on the left bank of the Dniester river as part of the Ukrainian SSR. Its formation was based on the so-called 'Piedmont principle', Moscow's strategy that 'cross-border ethnic ties could be exploited to project Soviet influence into neighboring states', in this case Romania.² The MASSR was comprised of only 30 per cent of the Moldavian–Romanian speaking population and was not a part of the medieval Romanian Principality of Moldavia. Bessarabia, in contrast, had been a component of historical Moldavia and was inhabited in the main by ethnic Romanians. In 1918 it united with the modern Romanian state, a move that Moscow refused to recognise due to Bessarabia's geopolitical position bordering the Danube mouth and Odessa. In 1940, following the Nazi–Soviet Pact and its secret protocols, Bessarabia was occupied by the Soviet Union, and as a result the Moldavian SSR was created by merging half of the MASSR and three quarters of Bessarabia. Strategic territories in the south of Bessarabia were given to Ukraine, the ethnic principle in this case being secondary.³

It is well known that the Soviet regime was highly ideologised in that its leaders perceived reality through an extremely politicised lens and often used euphemisms to hide or falsify phenomena that did not correspond, or ran counter, to official discourse. One can start with the term 'repression', which covers a large spectrum of crimes committed by the Soviet state against its own citizens. It could simply mean arrest without sentence, or arrest and incarceration in the Gulag or so-called 'special settlements' (*spetsposeleniia*), or execution following sentencing by an extra-judicial or quasi-judicial organ, such as a *troika* ('threesome') or *osoboe soveshchanie* (special board) of the secret police, the NKVD. Another euphemism relates to the rehabilitation of Stalinist victims before and after 1953. The term 'rehabilitation', generally referring to the liberation of members of the former *nomenklatura*, was used very rarely, as it presupposed the dangerous notion that the state acknowledged its guilt in punishing innocent people and consequently accepted an obligation to restore their property and former status. More often, the authorities spoke of the 'release' (*osvodozhdenie*), or 'amnesty' and 'pardon' (*pomilovanie*), of the repressed.

Amnesty and rehabilitation of Stalinist victims in Moldavia: main phases and context

The rehabilitation of certain categories of Stalinist victims started almost immediately after the dictator's death on 5 March 1953. The first categories, released under the 'On Amnesty' Decree of 27 March 1953,

were those condemned to less than five years' imprisonment, and pregnant women and children, the majority of whom had been sentenced for non-political crimes. In April-May 1954, as a result of concerted actions by the Soviet Procuracy, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice and the KGB, political inmates from the camps, prisons and special settlements began to be released.⁴ Special commissions of these institutions were created in each Soviet republic. In Moldavia, the local KGB played a leading role in dealing with the most politically sensitive categories of repressed persons: former *nomenklatura*, wartime collaborators, perpetrators of the Holocaust and members of armed anti-Soviet resistance groups. Of the 25 members of the commission in Moldavia, 11 represented the KGB, six the Ministry of the Interior, five the Procuracy and three the Ministry of Justice. It seems that the KGB enjoyed the same prerogatives throughout the USSR.⁵

The fate of other categories of former Stalinist victims, such as so-called *kulaks*, tradesmen and other well-to-do social groups, was decided by the Moldavian Council of Ministers. Overall, in the 1950s in Soviet Moldavia, 1,666 persons were rehabilitated; that is, 238 per year (1954–1960), the majority of them being party and state leaders, scholars, professors, writers and artists, as well as peasants. In subsequent decades, as the Soviet Union as a whole went through a partial re-Stalinisation, the pace of rehabilitation slowed. In the years 1962 to 1988, only 923 persons were rehabilitated in Moldavia, a mere 35 per year. During the same time frame, the sentences of 1,527 individuals were revised mainly in the sense of changing slightly the nature of the official charge. Only those who had survived the Stalinist terror and had been officially given 'rehabilitation' status could reclaim their lost properties. The third stage of the process during the Soviet period took place in the years 1989–1991, when large numbers of former victims of Stalinist state terror were rehabilitated. This was followed by a radical change in the politics of memory in the USSR, epitomised by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on 16 January 1989, 'On Supplementary Measures Concerning the Reinstatement of Justice to the Victims of Repression, 1930 to early 1953', and the Decree of the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, on 13 August 1990, 'On the Rehabilitation of the Rights of the Victims of Political Repression, 1930s-1950s'. Of the approximately 30,000 persons sentenced by judicial and non-judicial organs in the Moldavian SSR (and inter-war MASSR), more than two thirds of the total (21,000) were rehabilitated in the last years of the existence of the USSR, or immediately thereafter, in the period 1989–1992.⁶

Rehabilitation of the elites

The rehabilitation of members of the communist *nomenklatura*, begun in 1954, had basically ground to a halt by 1958. Overall, 557 victims of the Great Terror were rehabilitated, of whom about one third were ex-members of the party and state elites. The overwhelming majority of them were rehabilitated posthumously. The rehabilitation of communist elites usually involved the re-interrogation of witnesses and former denouncers, as well as a formal check on whether the accused had belonged to the inter-war Romanian political police, the *Siguranța*. Letters were dispatched to the Romanian Secret Police, the *Securitate*, to ascertain if any of the 557 victims had been agents of the royal Romanian *Siguranța*. The response was negative in all but one case.⁷ Among them were Grigorii Ivanovich Staryi-Borisov, who had served as Chairman of the Council of Commissars of the Moldavian ASSR in 1926–1928 and 1932–1937, and Nicolae Golub, *ad interim* ex-First Secretary of the Moldavian Regional Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party.⁸ Both had been executed in 1937–1938. Staryi went through the full process of rehabilitation, in the mid-1960s even becoming a ‘hero’ who had fought for the establishment of Soviet power in Transnistria and Bessarabia, but had later fallen victim to the Stalinist terror machine. This was the official Soviet historical discourse. Staryi’s name was given to a street in the capital city, Chișinău, and to the college of transport. The main reason why he was the only one chosen for this heroic role was probably the fact that he was an ethnic Russian born in Bessarabia into a family of railway workers, unlike the majority of leaders of the former MASSR, who generally had non-Russian and non-Moldavian–Romanian origins. In this, Staryi fitted exactly the paradigm of Soviet nationality policy, which emphasised the leading role of Russians (and Ukrainians after 1954) in the Soviet family of nations. This ethnic hierarchy was not a novelty, as Stalin had partially reinstated ‘Great Russian’ chauvinism in the late 1930s, and especially during and after the ‘Great Patriotic War’.

Besides, Staryi had indeed served the Soviet regime, participating in the revolutionary movement in Romanian-controlled Bessarabia in 1919 (the Bender rebellion) and shortly thereafter in the Tiraspol revolutionary committee as well as being one of the founding fathers of the MASSR in October 1924. There were, however, embarrassing details in Staryi’s biography, notably the fact that from 1932 to 1937 he had promoted the ‘Latinisation’ campaign in Moldavia – that is, the introduction of the Latin alphabet to make the local Moldavian idiom as close

as possible to the modern Romanian literary standard. In short, he was a 'Romanianiser', as the saying went at the time. This designation had no pejorative connotation before 1937–1938, but acquired it soon after. More exactly, if in the inter-war years the Soviet authorities hesitated between building a separate Moldavian ethno-nation or a Romanian one, after the war they firmly embarked on making Moldavians different from Romanians by forbidding the Latin alphabet, introducing Cyrillic and borrowing words from Russian, rather than from French as the Romanians favoured.⁹

The rehabilitation of those state and party leaders, as well as intellectuals, from the MASSR who were connected to the Latinisation campaign had a direct impact on nationalities policy in Soviet Moldavia during the Khrushchev 'Thaw'. As a side effect of this change, it was possible to re-publish some Romanian classics in Romanian, albeit in Cyrillic form and partially censored. Previously, the use of modern literary Romanian vocabulary in Moldavia had been officially viewed as nationalistic and anti-Soviet, but from the mid-1950s it became part of the Moldavian literary heritage. In this way, the great Romanian poet, Mihai Eminescu, was declared both a Romanian and Moldavian classic and a monument was erected to his honour in central Chișinău. The place became a traditional *lieu de mémoire* which the Soviet regime reluctantly tolerated, as in the case of the statue of Taras Shevchenko in Kiev.¹⁰

As far as Staryi and other victims are concerned, it was only during Gorbachev's *glasnost* that they were officially recognised as having been executed, not just loosely 'repressed' as asserted in post-Stalinist historical discourse.¹¹ The full list of executed persons shot on the basis of fabricated accusations – about 4,500 in total – became public knowledge only in 2010 after the creation of the Presidential Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Communist Totalitarian Regime in the Republic of Moldova.¹²

The fate of the victims of Stalinist mass terror

In this section I shall refer to several categories of victims of mass terror in Moldavia. There were three large deportations from the MASSR in the years 1930 to 1933 affecting 9,000 people (from a total population of half a million). During the Great Terror, under the *kulak* and 'Romanian' operations, the total number of repressed amounted again to approximately 9,000, about half of whom were executed and the rest sent to the Gulag. As mentioned above, there were also three mass deportations from the Moldavian SSR after 1940: in mid-June 1941,

early July 1949 and early April 1951, during which a total of around 60,000 persons were transported east. We do not know much about the fate of the victims of mass deportations from the MASSR in the 1930s, because after 1940 they were counted in official statistics as belonging to the territory of Ukraine.¹³

The 'Beria Amnesty' of 1953 and its impact on criminality in Moldavia

The first cohorts to be released, under the terms of the 'On Amnesty' Decree issued by the Supreme Soviet on 27 March 1953, were non-political prisoners. The so-called 'Beria Amnesty' liberated those who had been sentenced to less than five years for petty crimes, usually theft of public or private property.¹⁴ This amounted to about one third of the contingent of special settlers. There are as yet no exact figures on the number of those released in Moldavia, but we do have some archival evidence on the impact of the amnesty of non-political prisoners on criminality in Chişinău and other cities. In 1953, for example, 345 crimes were registered, 235 more than in the previous year.¹⁵ Moreover, in the first eight months of 1953, the third police section of Chişinău, which covered the railway station and other critical areas, opened 43 penal files against 51 individuals, all of them former prisoners or deportees released according to the 'Beria Amnesty'. Almost half the charges pertained to 'hooliganism', with eight persons breaching the passport regime. In order to combat the rising proportion of petty crimes committed by amnestied individuals, the Ministry of the Interior attempted to recruit more agents from this category of the population. In 1953 alone, three agents were taken on, all of them recently released from incarceration.¹⁶

Crime was also on the increase in other towns, especially those with railway stations. In Tiraspol, Bender and Ungheni, nine robberies and 81 thefts were reportedly committed by amnestied individuals. Consequently, police officers and their collaborators were afraid to wander at night in certain areas of town. A few of them even committed suicide: in 1953 there were five such cases and three attempted suicides.¹⁷ Another source of the soaring criminality rate was the various misdemeanours perpetrated by members of the communist party or, more frequently, the communist youth organisation (Komsomol). Probably intoxicated by the new air of freedom after Stalin's death and less fearful of reprimand, privileged youngsters were given to vodka-laden partying, which not infrequently ended in fights and minor debaucheries.¹⁸ Similar practices were bemoaned by Kundin, chief of militia in the large

central section of Chișinău. At a meeting in the Ministry of the Interior in early September 1953, while noting that the rising crime rate was partly fuelled by the amnestied, he argued that the most important cause was the fact that youths from different parts of the city, many of them emotionally unstable and insufficiently educated, congregated in their spare time in the central districts and engaged in all manner of drunken parties resulting in fist fights, hooliganism and other anti-social acts.¹⁹ At the same time, the number of crimes went down in rural localities, which indicates the urban nature of the phenomenon.

On the whole, however, it does appear that the growth in petty, sometimes violent, crime was indeed related to the release of non-political inmates from the Gulag. In the first half of 1957, for example, 234 returnees were arrested and condemned, the majority being sentenced under article 74 of the criminal code ('hooliganism', understood as disrespect for society) or the 4 June 1947 decree (theft of state property).²⁰ This seems to suggest that 'political' Gulag returnees, liberated after 1954, were rather more likely to get embroiled in attempts to reclaim their lost properties and express dissatisfaction with the regime's refusal to meet their requests than to indulge in the relatively minor criminal activities (robberies and brawling) that mushroomed in Chișinău and other cities right after the amnesty of 'non-politicals' on 27 March 1953.

Release of children and other categories

In sum, the decrees and amnesties of 1953–1955 affected only a small proportion of the former deportees. Among the first categories to be released from the special settlements were children. In 1949, 166 children had been deported while their parents remained in the MSSR. Official procedures for sending them back to their families commenced in September 1953.²¹ At the mass level, however, the process started with a special decision by the Soviet Ministry of Interior and Procuracy on 27 March 1954, exactly one year after the 'Beria Amnesty'. This decree eliminated certain restrictions on children from deported families in that they were no longer obliged to register with the local militia, and the latter were no longer permitted to keep the children under surveillance. Another key decision, this time by the Soviet Council of Ministers, was taken on 5 July 1954 stipulating that deported children under 16 years of age were to be released from special settlements. In addition, children over 16 involved in one or another form of education were also to be liberated. Providing they had passed admission

exams, they were free to go to any part of the Soviet Union.²² This ruling was valid for deported children from the western parts of the USSR, the so-called 'Molotov-Ribbentrop' areas: the Baltic States, western Ukraine and western Belorussia, as well as Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. In total, by 1 January 1955 around 11,000 children from the mass deportation of July 1949 and another 1,400 from the mass deportation of mid-June 1941 had been released.²³

One child who came back from Siberia to Moldavia reminisced many years later about her return home. Margareta Cemortan-Spanu was struck by the conditions in the train: whereas in 1949 she was one of tens of people dumped unceremoniously in a cattle truck, in 1955 she travelled in a relatively civilised wagon where she was served with tea. It is true that her father remained in the Gulag for several more years, but she came back with her grandmother, who, unfortunately, died soon afterwards. At least her grandmother's last wish was fulfilled: to die at home. Margareta had a very difficult life after returning to Moldavia. She married young and slowly grew accustomed to normal life, and in 1964 she finally succeeded in moving from Bălți in the north to Chișinău.²⁴ More often, youngsters were sent home alone, while their parents came later, after finally securing their own release. The three children of Toader Bunesco, for instance, were sent by train to Moldavia in late August 1956 in order to start school on 1 September. The mother and father only came back in February 1957. One of the children, Gheorghe, recalled five decades later that the majority of local people thought they had been sent to Siberia because their parents were indeed guilty of committing some crime or other. As a result, he was tempted to retort: 'If your father had worked harder you too could have had a rich household and thus shared our fate.' But he restrained himself from replying, fearing that somebody would denounce his 'anti-Soviet agitation', and the family might be sent back to Siberia.²⁵

Release of *kulaks*, former landowners and tradesmen

The mass release of rank-and-file deportees from the Gulag special settlements came on the eve of, and immediately after, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956. The process, however, had been anticipated several years earlier. Interestingly, the first stage actually began during Stalin's rule. It concerned the liberation of 87 families (339 people in total), as well as 108 individuals, who had family or relatives in the Red Army.²⁶ The mass release of persons deemed 'class enemies', because of their property status and

economic activity prior to the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia, started in 1954. This was not, however, a general amnesty of entire social categories. It was, rather, the result of the examination of huge numbers of individual files. For example, in 1954, 1,000 families (2,057 persons) from the Moldavian SSR were released from special settlements. In the following year, 1,459 Moldavian families (3,070 individuals) were freed. In the ten months after February 1956, restrictions on obligatory residence for another 831 families (1,827 persons) were removed. All in all, a total of 6,950 individuals from Moldavia were released from special settlements in Siberia and Kazakhstan on the basis of decisions in 1954–1956 undertaken by the MSSR Council of Ministers, the Moldavian and Soviet Supreme Courts, as well as the Moldavian Ministry of the Interior. The official reasons for these decisions varied significantly: some were declared innocent and unjustly deported, others, even single people, were set free out of humanitarian concerns, such as old age or inability to work.²⁷ Early amnesty applied to other categories of deportees as well. In November 1955, according to a resolution of the Soviet Central Committee, participants in the ‘Great Patriotic War’, those awarded medals and orders of the USSR, and families having one or more members who fought on the Soviet side and died during the war were released from administrative supervision by the Soviet Ministry of the Interior.²⁸ As for deportees from the MSSR, this decree affected about 2,000 families.²⁹

One of the most sensitive issues pertaining to the rehabilitation process of the peasantry was the restitution of property. Only a very small minority, about 1,500 persons, reclaimed their properties – those who were able to convince the Moldavian Council of Ministers that their pre-deportation property status did not warrant their classification as a *kulak* or landowner. Another controversial aspect of the rehabilitation process was the right of residency in Moldavia after release from camp or special settlement. In this case, by late 1956 only a few had received permission to come back, although between 1958 and 1960 the Council of Ministers allowed a further 833 families to return.³⁰ The situation improved in 1961, when, from a total of 15,486 deported families in 1941, 1949 and 1951, 14,902 were released from special settlements, but even then, 5,747 families were denied the right to settle in Moldavia. In 1961–1963, 1,200 more families moved back. This suggests that the illegal return to Moldavia became a mass phenomenon and the Soviet regime legitimised it *post factum*. The great bulk of Gulag returnees, however, did not return to their former localities, but to neighbouring ones, or they settled in cities, taking on a semi-legal status.³¹

Release and reduction of sentences for wartime collaborators

Individuals who fought against the Soviet regime and Red Army and those considered collaborators during the war formed another category released from special settlements, prison, labour camps or colonies. A special decree to this effect – also discussed by Oleg Bazhan in his contribution to this volume – was passed by the Supreme Soviet on 17 September 1955.³² This ruling changed the fate of about 3,000 families, or approximately 10,000 persons, from Moldavia who had previously been condemned for collaborationism.³³ The review process for the more complex cases in this category of prisoner had started earlier, in 1954, in the framework of the Moldavian Commission for the Revision of Criminal Files of persons sentenced for 'counter-revolutionary' crimes. The revision was made on the basis of letters of complaint sent by convicted persons. These cases are scattered among 60 volumes that constitute the outcome of the Commission's work, and the sheer bulk of material has as yet precluded any definitive conclusions. However, a selective list of cases from several volumes suggests some tentative propositions. About 50 per cent of 'collaborators' and 'traitors to the Fatherland' were condemned to ten years' forced labour or to penal colonies, plus five years' deprivation of civil rights and confiscation of property. These cases related to relatively minor instances of collaborationist activity in the years 1941–1944 in Bessarabia and Transnistria, provinces ruled jointly by Romanian and German wartime administrations. The normal accusation was participating in the identification and arrest of local Soviet party, state and Komsomol activists, as well as partisans, parachutists, soldiers and officers of the Red Army.

Only in rare cases did the revision of the charges result in a reduction of the sentence. For example, a village mayor, officially designated as a *kulak*, was accused of participating in the arrest of local communist activists as well as collecting food from the population for the needs of the Romanian army. His initial sentence in 1946 to ten years' forced labour and five years' deprivation of civil rights was reduced to five years' forced labour. As five years had already expired since his conviction, it was decided that he should be released under the terms of the 'On Amnesty' Decree of 27 March 1953. The official justifications for cutting his initial sentence in half were (and these were fairly common in other cases): (1) his actions did not bear lethal consequences; (2) he served in the Red Army between May 1944 and May 1945, was wounded and became a war invalid – that is, he had displayed a certain loyalty to the

USSR; and (3) the sentence handed down by the Military Tribunal of the Moldavian NKVD in 1946 was deemed harsh because, although he had collaborated with the occupying forces during the war, his behaviour could not be defined as 'treacherous'.³⁴

The second, and main, category of 'collaborationism' related to instances of active participation and collusion with the Romanian and German wartime authorities. These cases included assisting not only in the identification and arrest of Soviet activists and officials, but also in using violence and taking part in executions. Such individuals generally received 25 years' forced labour plus five years' deprivation of civil rights and loss of all property without compensation. In several of these cases, it was later established that confessions had been fabricated and, as a consequence the initial sentence was reduced to ten years.³⁵ This ruling was also applied to two 'collaborators' on the mitigating circumstances that their social background was middle and poor peasant. Other details counted in their favour: their actions were not serious (the Soviet activists arrested were not condemned) and both had served in the Red Army in 1944–1945, one receiving a medal for courageously fighting for the Soviet Fatherland. The fact that one of the peasants was a member of the inter-war Romanian far-right anti-Semitic party was overlooked in this case, though not in others.³⁶ The ethnic allegiance of the condemned and partially pardoned was various: about half were ethnic Moldavians/Romanians; the others were ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, both local and from other parts of the USSR, and some ethnic Bulgarians from south Bessarabia. In at least one case, the accusation concerned a Jewish woman sentenced in 1945 to ten years' forced labour and five years' deprivation of civil rights for serving as an informer of the Romanian Gendarmerie while being in a Jewish camp in the Vinnitsa region of Ukraine. Because of her young age, the initial sentence was reduced in 1954 to five years' forced labour, and she was released the following year.³⁷

As a rule, revisions of the initial sentence were denied to those war criminals condemned for participating in the execution of Soviet activists, partisans, parachutists or Jews. This also applied to most collaborators who had participated in the identification and arrest, though not the execution, of Jews. At the same time, the sentences imposed on war criminals were usually lighter than for other categories of convicted people. For instance, a man who took part in the execution of 15 Jews, one Soviet officer and two Red Army soldiers was sentenced in 1945 to ten years' forced labour and five years' deprivation of civil rights. However, in his case a reduction of the term was ruled out, as no

mitigating circumstances (such as subsequent loyal service in the Red Army) could be taken into account.³⁸

'The other side of the moon': the fate of Stalinist perpetrators

In parallel with the release, amnesty, pardon or rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinist state terror, it is essential to examine the fate of former perpetrators of mass crimes.³⁹ Some were punished, sent to prison or even executed on the charge of 'breaching revolutionary legality'. But this was not done meticulously or systematically. For instance, during the 'mini-thaw' of late 1938 to early 1940, the perpetrators of the Great Terror in Moldavia were convicted in a highly arbitrary manner, a fact that resembled selective justice rather than a concerted attempt to reprimand those responsible for the crimes. Many were sentenced for engaging in 'excesses' (*peregiby*), the implication being that the treatment of the victims was legitimate and necessary, but that some NKVD personnel overdid the use of officially permitted physical methods. One of them was Ivan Shirokii-Maiskii, head of the Moldavian secret police between May and September 1938. He was arrested in late September on charges that he had fabricated the files of innocent persons, including high party and state officials. He allegedly committed suicide on 18 December 1938 in the NKVD prison in Kiev, shortly after being sentenced to death.⁴⁰ In the period from late 1938 to early 1940, other top officials were punished in one way or another. Among them were Aleksandr Tomin, Vice Commissar of the MASSR NKVD in 1938–1939, who was sentenced to six years in a correctional labour camp in January 1941 and released in August 1942, though without the charges being dropped, and Mark Rogol', Vice Commissar of the republican NKVD from January to August 1937, who was arrested in April 1938 and condemned to five years in a correctional labour camp.⁴¹

The case of Lazar Rivlin, the longest-serving high official in the NKVD in Tiraspol during the Great Terror, merits special attention. Even though he was strongly implicated in giving orders to use physical violence during interrogations, in December 1939 he received a relatively mild sentence – eight years in the Gulag. After the start of the Nazi–Soviet war in June 1941, several thousand former NKVD officers, like Rivlin, were released from the camps and sent to the front. Rivlin was set free in August 1942 (a decision which amounted to a partial amnesty rather than rehabilitation), was sent to the front in the penal battalions (*Shtrafbat*), and the charges against him were dropped in October 1943,

although he was barred from further work in the NKVD.⁴² Another high official involved in the Great Terror in Moldavia was Nikolai Lyutyi-Shestakovskii, Deputy Commissar of the NKVD between December 1937 and March 1938. He was no less involved in the brutal treatment of innocent persons, a torture chamber being established in Tiraspol during his term of office. His fate, however, was different from that of his colleagues. He was not punished – quite the contrary, as his career sky-rocketed. In 1949 he was appointed vice chief of the special settlements section of the Gulag in the Soviet Ministry of the Interior and was sent to Chișinău in June-July of the same year to organise the mass deportations as an ‘expert’ on Moldavia.⁴³

At the all-Union level, the best-known case of retribution against high-ranking NKVD officials was that of Stalin’s faithful lieutenant Beria, who was arrested in June 1953 and executed half a year later. A group perceived as being Beria’s ‘gang’ was also executed, among them V. N. Merkulov, B. Z. Kobulov and S. A. Goglidze, who were all involved in the organisation of the Moldavian mass deportations in mid-June 1941.⁴⁴ But after 1953, the treatment of certain perpetrators suggests that the Soviet regime was losing interest in punishing those individuals personally responsible for excesses in fighting the ‘enemies of the people’. For example, Ivan Serov, who had been involved in several mass crimes including the Katyn massacre and the deportations from western Ukraine in 1940–1941, was elevated to high positions, becoming the head of the KGB in March 1954. This was largely because Khrushchev, himself implicated in the Great Terror in Ukraine in 1938, was Serov’s protector.⁴⁵

This reality was mirrored in Moldavia, where Iosif Mordovets, one of the main perpetrators of Stalinist crimes, became the first chief of the local KGB. He started his career in the ‘organs’ in the mid-1930s as boss of the NKVD in Kamenets-Podolsk in Ukraine. He thus had experience of mass murder during the Terror. Mordovets survived the ‘purge of the purgers’ of late 1938 to early 1940, and was appointed Vice Commissar of the Moldavian NKVD in 1940–1941. According to recently declassified KGB documents in Chișinău, he participated personally in the vast majority of executions of ‘enemies of the people’ in the first year of occupation of Bessarabia.⁴⁶ From 1944 to 1953, he was both Commissar of the Moldavian NKVD and Minister of State Security; that is, he was personally involved in all state terror campaigns in the late Stalinist era. Between March 1953 and April 1954, Mordovets was Minister of the Interior, and after the Soviet political police was renamed and re-envisioned as the KGB, he was chief of its Moldavian

branch until April 1955. It is interesting that as a former perpetrator, he was a member of the Commission for the Revision of Criminal Files of the victims of Stalinist terror (as was Ivan Serov at the all-Union level).⁴⁷ The Commission was created in Chişinău in June 1954 and started its work in July. In this hypostasis, Mordovets was acting as the judge of his own deeds. This explains, in part, the limits of the rehabilitation process in Moldavia after 1953, and the contradictions of Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation throughout the USSR.

In 1954, letters were sent to Moscow complaining about Mordovets' mismanagement and abuses, which allegedly proved to be false,⁴⁸ and he was eventually dismissed in spring 1955 at the age of 56. He was not, however, formally charged with any crimes.⁴⁹ He received merely a severe reprimand from the Moldavian party on 29 May 1955 for 'breaking Soviet laws in his capacity as Minister of State Security of the Moldavian SSR'.⁵⁰ After serving as head of the Personnel Department of the Ministry of Public Utilities for a year, he retired and lived a quiet life in Chişinău until his death in 1976. Before this, however, on 4 September 1973, Mordovets' party reprimand had been annulled.⁵¹ This represented a formal rehabilitation in an era – the early 1970s – when political repression against the 'Moldavian–Romanian nationalists' and other 'anti-Soviet elements' was intensified, with several individuals and groups being condemned to prison and correctional labour colonies.⁵²

Another perpetrator, Boris Yakovlevich Ronis, chief of the Special Department (*spetsotdel*) of the MASSR NKVD in the summer and autumn of 1938 and Secretary to the *troika* in Tiraspol, shared a similar experience to Mordovets. After 1946, Ronis became the head of the *spetsotdel* in the Ministry of the Interior and in 1954, he was appointed secretary of the Commission for the Revision of Criminal Files, the same body of which Mordovets was a member.⁵³ Hence, Ronis likewise acted as the arbiter of his own actions.

The fate of Colonel Vladimir Ashakhmanov is also revealing in terms of post-1953 Soviet policy towards the perpetrators of Stalinist crimes. In December 1946–January 1947, at the height of the mass famine, Ashakhmanov initiated and coordinated the execution of individuals trying to escape to Romania. Even though in early 1947, a special commission established that he had been responsible for breaking the law, the NKVD Military Tribunal of the Moldavian SSR sentenced his subordinates, not him, to prison.⁵⁴ Three decades later, in 1977, the Supreme Soviet awarded Ashakhmanov the order 'Veteran of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union' for his lifetime services to the Fatherland. For Soviet rule, under both Stalin and Brezhnev, Ashakhmanov was a hero.⁵⁵ In

the Brezhnevite 'era of stagnation', this attitude was symptomatic of the regime's responses to the innocent victims of the mass famine in Moldavia in 1946–1947, when the proportional death toll due to 'dys-trophy' was four or five times higher than in Russia and Ukraine.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In general terms, the fate of the victims of Stalinist state terror in the Moldavian SSR reveals a story of essentially innocent persons coming back to their homes after years of living thousands of miles away in the inhospitable regions of the Soviet Far East. The majority of them returned not because of the regime, but in defiance of its continued bans and interdictions. The number of illegal returnees was so large that the authorities in Moscow and Chișinău decided not to resist openly, as that would be perceived as a second deportation, a highly sensitive subject from the political point of view. The return of confiscated property was very rare and, where it did occur, seemed to be more about upholding 1930s legal definitions of *kulaks* than about formulating a positive approach to addressing victims' grievances. The liberation in the 1950s from labour camps and special settlements of former inter-war Bessarabian intellectuals had a longer-lasting impact on Moldavian society. This 'Thaw generation', inspired by the rehabilitation process and the mass releases from the Gulag, tacitly pushed for the abolition of the more discriminatory aspects of Soviet nationality policy and oversaw a certain cultural renaissance, including the re-publication of the major Romanian classics.⁵⁷ The 'Thaw' itself was short-lived, however, and in so far as it allowed the rehabilitation of communist elites, including those involved in culture and the arts, and a more open confrontation with the Stalinist past, it was effectively over by 1958.

Notes

1. On the limitations of de-Stalinisation, see P. Jones (ed), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London, 2006). Specifically on Soviet Moldavia, see I. Cașu and M. Sandle, 'Discontent and Uncertainty in the Borderlands: Soviet Moldavia and the Secret Speech 1956–1957', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 66, no. 4 (2014), pp. 613–44.
2. T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), pp. 274–5.
3. For further details, see I. Cașu and V. Păslariuc, 'Moldavian SSR's Border Revision Question: From the Project of "Greater Moldavia" to the Project of

- "Greater Bessarabia" and the Causes of Their Failure (December 1943–June 1946)', *Archiva Moldaviae*, vol. 2 (2010), pp. 275–370.
4. A. Artizov, Iu. Sigachev, I. Shevchuk and V. Khlopov (eds), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie materialy, mart 1953-fevral' 1956*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2000), pp. 15–187.
 5. Archive of the Service of Information and Security of the Republic of Moldova (former KGB), *Protokoly zasedaniiia Komissii Moldavskoi SSR po peresmotru ugovolnykh del ossuzhdenykh za kontrrevoliutsionnye prestupleniia*, vol. 1–2 (1954), ll. 1–3 (hereafter ASISRM-KGB, *Protokoly zasedaniiia Komissii Moldavskoi SSR*).
 6. A. Tirikin, 'V Moskve svedeniia ob agenture moldavskogo KGB nikogda ne zakadyvalis', *Nezavisimaia Moldaviia*, 18 July 1992, p. 3; *Report of the Service of Information and Security of the Republic of Moldova, May 2010* (unpublished special release for internal use for members of the Presidential Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Communist Totalitarian Regime in the Republic of Moldova, created in January 2010 by the *ad interim* President of the Republic of Moldova, Mihai Ghimpu); V. Tsaranov, *Operatsiia IUG* (Chişinău, 1998), pp. 88–90.
 7. ASISRM-KGB, personal file 09680, ll. 46, 53, 56, 62, 84, 87.
 8. Archive of the Social-Political Organisations of the Republic of Moldova, former archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldavia (hereafter AOSPRM), f. 51, inv. 15, d. 276, ll. 7–14; ASISRM-KGB, *Spisok sovetskikh grazhdan neobosnovanno repressirovannykh organami NKVD MASSR v 1937–1938 i reabilitirovannykh v 1956–1958 za otsutstviem sostava pristupleniia*, ll. 1–27.
 9. For further details, see C. King, 'The Ambivalence of Ethnicity or How the Moldovan Language was Made', *Slavic Review*, vol. 58, no. 1 (1999), pp. 117–42. See also his *Moldovans: Cultural Politics Between Romania and Russia* (Stanford, 2001).
 10. I. Caşu, 'Was the Soviet Union an Empire? A View from Chisinau', *Dystopia. Journal of Totalitarian Ideologies and Regimes*, vol. 1, no. 1–2 (2012), p. 287.
 11. See a biography of Staryi in D. E. Shemeakov and V. P. Isac (eds), *Luptători pentru fericirea poporului* (Chişinău, 1985).
 12. I. Varta, T. Varta and I. Şarov (eds), *Asasinările în masă din RASSM în perioada Marii Terori: Documente desecretizate din arhivele SIS şi MAI ale Republicii Moldova*, vol. 1 (Chişinău, 2010), p. 828. See also I. Caşu, *Duşmanul de clasă: Represiuni politice, violenţă şi rezistenţă în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924–1956* (Chişinău, 2014), pp. 77–118.
 13. Caşu, *Duşmanul de clasă*, pp. 353–5.
 14. Lavrentii Beria was head of the NKVD from 25 November 1938 to 29 December 1945, Vice Chairman of the Soviet government in charge of the political and civil police (February 1941 to March 1953) and for a short while chief of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) after Stalin's death (March–June 1953). See more in N. Petrov and N. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934–1941: Spravochnik* (Moscow, 1999), <http://www.memo.ru/history/nkvd/kto/index.htm> (accessed 24 July 2014).
 15. Archive of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Moldova, former MVD (hereafter AMAIRM-MVD), f. 16, inv. 1, d. 342, l. 70.
 16. AMAIRM-MVD, f. 16, inv. 1, d. 342, ll. 67–8.

17. Ibid., ll. 70, 78; d. 395, l. 139.
18. Ibid., l. 62.
19. Ibid., l. 64. For more on the link between the rise in criminality after Stalin and the mass releases from the Gulag, see M. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), esp. pp. 109–32.
20. V. Pasat (ed.), *Trudnye stranitsy Moldovy, 1940–1950 gg* (Moscow, 1994), p. 741.
21. Ibid., pp. 698–9.
22. Artizov et al. (eds), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo*, vol. 1, pp. 158–9.
23. N. I. Vladimirtsev and A. I. Kokurin, *NKVD-MVD SSSR v bor'be s banditizmom i vooruzhenym natsionalisticheskim podpol'em na zapadnoi Ukrainie, v zapadnoi Belarussii i Pribaltike, 1939–1956: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 2008), pp. 487–9.
24. 'The monk' Moise (ed.), *Să nu ne răzbunați! Mărturii despre suferințele românilor din Basarabia* (Alba Iulia, 2012), pp. 97–132.
25. A. Petrencu et al., *Românii în Gulag: Memorii, Mărturii, Documente* (Chișinău, 2014), p. 103.
26. ASISRM-KGB, *Delo po Operatsii IUG*, l. 318.
27. V. Pasat, *Calvarul: Documentarul deportărilor pe de teritoriul RSS Moldovenești, 1940–1950* (Moscow, 2006), pp. 415–16.
28. Artizov et al. (eds), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo*, vol. 1, p. 287.
29. Pasat, *Calvarul*, p. 416.
30. The National Archive of the Republic of Moldova, f. 2848, inv. 7, d. 1036, ll. 1–4, 6–6 verso, 8–12, 16–17, 19–27; d. 963, ll. 1–4, 8–9, 16–21, 23–36; d. 964, ll. 2–3, 6–7, 10–16, 33–4, 74, 84–9, 91–5, 106–8, 116–18, 119, 164–6.
31. Figures taken from Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy*, pp. 746–7, and Tsaranov, *Operatsiia IUG*, pp. 88–90.
32. Artizov et al. (eds), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo*, vol. 1, pp. 259–60.
33. Pasat, *Calvarul*, p. 412.
34. ASISRM-KGB, *Protokoly zasedaniia Komissii Moldavskoi SSR*, vol. 4 (1954), ll. 123–6.
35. Ibid., vol. 5 (1954), ll. 81–7, 115–17.
36. Ibid., ll. 152–56; and vol. 4, ll. 90–2.
37. Ibid., vol. 1–2 (1954), ll. 119–20.
38. Ibid., vol. 5 (1954), ll. 55–60; 65–8; and vol. 5, ll. 110–14.
39. For a recent comprehensive analysis of the subject, see L. Viola, 'The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History', *Slavic Review*, vol. 72, no. 1 (2013), pp. 1–23.
40. ASISRM-KGB, personal file 31233, ll. 194–5.
41. For further details, see Cașu, *Dușmanul de clasă*, pp. 105–6.
42. Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*; A. Teplakov, 'Amnistirovannye chekisty 1930-kh gg. v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny', *Clio. Zhurnal dlia uchemykh*, no. 7 (2012), pp. 64–5.
43. Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*; AMAIRM-MVD, f. 16, inv. 1, d. 105, ll. 82, 83, 89.
44. For further details, see V. Naumov and V. Sigachev (eds), *Lavrenti Beria, 1953: Stenograma iul'skogo plenuma TSK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moscow, 1999).

45. N. Petrov, 'Pervyi predsedatel' KGB general Ivan Serov', *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 5 (1997), pp. 23–43.
46. ASISRM-KGB, delo 32867, vol. 4, ll. 8, 12, 15, 17, 22, 38.
47. ASISRM-KGB, *Protokoly zasedaniia Komissii Moldavskoi SSR*, vols 1–2, ll. 1–3; vol. 3, l. 1; vol. 4, l. 1; vol. 5, l. 1; vol. 6, l. 1.
48. AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 13, d. 335, ll. 2, 4.
49. Several cases of abuses committed by NKVD cadres were left open, and we do not yet know their results. AMAIRM-MVD, f. 16, inv. 1, d. 393, l. 292.
50. AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 34, d. 56, l. 220.
51. *Ibid.*, d. 77, l. 206.
52. AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 33, d. 50, ll. 15–16; ASISRM-KGB, *Sekretnye prikazy KGB MSSR*, vol. 2 (1973), ll. 33–8. For further details, see I. Cașu, 'Political Repressions in Moldavian SSR After 1956: Towards a Typology based on KGB Files', *Dystopia. Journal of Totalitarian Ideologies and Regimes*, vol. 1, no. 1–2 (2012), pp. 89–127.
53. AMAIRM-MVD, *Protokoly osoboi troiki NKVD MASSR, 1938*, vol. 28–37; AMAIRM-MVD, f. 17, inv. 1, d. 45, l. 2.
54. AOSPRM, f. 51, inv. 5, d. 84, ll. 85–91.
55. Cașu, *Dușmanul de clasă*, pp. 226–8.
56. M. Ellman, 'The 1947 Soviet Famine and the Entitlement Approach to Famines', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 24 (2000), p. 613.
57. For more details, see I. Cașu, "'The Quiet Revolution": Revisiting the National Identity Issue in Soviet Moldavia at the Height of Khrushchev's Thaw (1956)', *Euxeinos* (University of St. Gallen, Switzerland), vol. 15–16 (2014), pp. 77–91.

11

Latvian Deportees of the 1940s: Their Release and Rehabilitation

Irēna Saleniece

Following the division of the Baltic states between the USSR and Nazi Germany during the Second World War, the hitherto independent state of Latvia became an integral component of the Soviet sphere of influence. The Red Army first entered the country in June 1940, when a 'socialist revolution' was staged by pro-Moscow forces, and in early August, Latvia, along with Estonia and Lithuania, was 'voluntarily' incorporated into the Soviet Union. The new regime's attempts to establish a Sovietised system were not supported by the mass of the people, not least because the practices were accompanied by violent repressions. War hostilities started on Latvian territory in the summer of 1941, when Nazi forces promptly occupied the entire land for more than three years. This was followed in 1944 by Soviet re-occupation, re-Sovietisation efforts and reprisals against the native population. The scale and character of the repression, as well as the intensity and shape of Latvian resistance, differed from the Stalinist period to Khrushchev's 'Thaw' to the Brezhnevite 'era of stagnation', but harmony between the communist regime and the local community was never attained. Taking advantage of a weakened Soviet government, Latvia, together with the other Baltic nations, demanded its freedom and peacefully achieved independence in 1991. Recovery and the restoration of the democratic parliamentary republic was followed by the withdrawal of Russian troops from Latvia and accession to the European Union in 2004.

Communist totalitarianism suppressed hundreds of thousands of people in Latvia, not only by employing overarching ideological and psychological pressures, but also by engaging in open terror. During the Soviet period, from a population of approximately 2 million, around 180,000–190,000 people were directly repressed: killed, incarcerated, sent to Gulag labour camps or deported from their homeland.

This chapter will specifically address the experiences of those citizens deported from Latvia, with a focus on their release from 'special settlement' after 1953 and their subsequent fates.

The deportations of 1941 and 1949: historiography and sources

Deportations as a form of Soviet repressive policy took place in Latvia in 1941, and again between 1944 and 1953. As a result, more than 60,000 people (about 3 per cent of the pre-war population) were transplanted from the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) to distant regions of the USSR. Mass deportations took place on 14 June 1941 and 25 March 1949 (see Table 11.1), the aim of the former being the destruction of local elites in order that the communists could more easily dominate society. Given that most Latvians (about 65 per cent) at this time lived in rural areas, about one third of those arrested were farmers.¹ The 1949 deportation was specifically aimed at rural residents. Indeed, the regime was preparing to implement mass collectivisation in Latvia, just as in the remainder of the Baltics. The experience the Soviet authorities had gained from their collectivisation efforts in the 1930s led them to root out any possible resistance by expelling so-called 'dangerous elements' or the more

Table 11.1 Deportees from Latvia (1941–1953)

14 June 1941	15,424 'people's enemies', 'socially alien elements'	Fonds 1987 <i>Cases of persons deported from Latvia on 14 June 1941</i> 5,165 files
25 March 1949	43,133 <i>kulaks</i> , 'bandits', 'nationalists' and their families	Fonds 1894 <i>Cases of persons deported from Latvia on 25 March 1945</i> 13,358 files
February 1945	675 ethnic Germans	Fond 1994 <i>Cases of German ethnic inhabitants,</i>
1945–1951	129 'socially dangerous elements'	<i>aliens, members of religious sects and 'anti-social elements' deported from Latvia in 1945–1955</i>
1945–1953	584 family members of 'traitors of the Motherland'	1,239 files
1951	40 Jehovah's Witnesses	
	233 after filtration	
	60,218 persons	In 19,672 files of the State Archives of Latvia

Note: Data summarised by the staff of the State Archives of Latvia.

affluent farmers (*kulaks*), as well as potential 'enemies' of the regime – family members of previously deported 'bourgeois nationalists' and supporters of the national partisans ('bandits'). The Baltic peoples were painfully and irrevocably wounded by these 'routine' acts of coercion.²

In Siberia, people deported from Latvia, especially in 1941, existed in unimaginable conditions and many perished. However, despite captivity and oppression, the deportees tried hard to sustain their national values. Their sole lifeline was aid proffered by the people of Siberia and their bond with relatives and friends in Latvia, who sent provisions and letters. But apart from food and items of primary daily needs, other objects that helped the deportees preserve (at least symbolically) their identity travelled from Latvia to Siberia; for instance, a myrtle twig symbolising innocence and virginity for a deported girl to pin to her veil on her wedding day.³ In the eyes of the agents of power, both the deported and those who communicated with them were suspect, even dangerous and threatening. Suspicion was aroused by misunderstandings about ideals, as the highest values proclaimed by Soviet ideology automatically excluded private property, religion and ethnic feelings. In turn, people who were born and brought up in independent Latvia had always respected religious and ethnic sentiment, and considered land property the greatest benefit for humans, a source of material wellbeing and respect of others. Under the new conditions, their whole world was destroyed at a stroke: norms and values were rejected, the integrity of their families and even life as such were endangered. Besides, all this happened by will of the power that was ostensibly supposed to safeguard security and sustain order, not cause chaos. People were treated by officials as criminals, but for what reason? The answer to this question has not been established up to now.

It must be borne in mind that in the course of the mass deportations, people were notionally exiled 'forever, without the right to return'. Everybody had to sign up to this when reaching their place of settlement. The confusion concerning the causes of the repressions in 1949 urged many 'specially settled' persons to appeal to the supreme authorities for the elimination of 'errors' and for their consequent release.⁴ Initially, most of these requests were denied, except for those individuals who had been deported in violation of the regulating instructions of 1949. However, according to a special declaration of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR, 32 families were set free in 1949, 35 in 1950 and in 1951–1952 some 'unjustly deported *kulak* families' were also released from 'special settlement'.⁵ Still, these cases were a mere drop in the ocean.

Systematic research on the deportations was initiated by historians and Sovietologists in Western Europe and the USA during the Cold War, including scholars of Latvian origin, who started exploring the deportations in the context of Sovietisation.⁶ However, due to the inaccessibility of archival sources, western scholarship remained perforce incomplete. In Soviet historiography, including works by Latvian experts, the deportations were very seldom mentioned, but if so they were presented as manifestations of a historically unavoidable 'class struggle' aimed at *kulaks* and other 'anti-Soviet elements'. In the understanding of Soviet historians, 'class struggle' and the resistance of 'class enemies' fully justified the repressions,⁷ and Soviet historiography was not above the extensive use of methods of falsification.⁸ With the introduction of *glasnost* ('openness') under Mikhail Gorbachev, the scale of the repressions emerged as a subject of study, and since independence in the early 1990s, the topic of Soviet mass deportations has become a priority issue for scholars in the Baltic states. In contemporary Latvian historical writing, they are placed in the context of Sovietisation, especially agrarian policy and collectivisation,⁹ and great attention is devoted to the relationship between deportations and the anti-Soviet national resistance movement.¹⁰ One of the first studies dedicated to the release of Latvian citizens from special settlements was an archival-based article by Jānis Riekstiņš, published in 2007.¹¹ In this piece, the author detailed the post-Stalinist legislation that determined the liberation of the deported, as well as the course of their release. In an earlier article, the same author discussed the sensitive issue of the belongings left by deported residents, and the attempts of persons released from special settlements and administrative surveillance to regain their property.¹² However, on the whole, the liberation of the deported, their return home and their post-release life in Soviet society are themes that require further investigation.

In the 1990s, archives relating to the deportations were opened for research. The staff of the State Archives of Latvia¹³ (LNA LVA) collected the registry and criminal cases of deported citizens of Latvia, and compiled lists of deported persons. In cooperation with other state institutions, a database was produced between 2001 and 2007,¹⁴ and the collection 'The Deported' (*Aizvestie*) was issued, which provided basic information on every deported Latvian resident.¹⁵

Precise statistics about those released from special settlements in Siberia are not available. Data collected from various sources on the number of released differ: the Public Prosecution Service of the LSSR reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia

in April 1959 that 58,266 people had been released from 'special settlement' between 1954 and 1 April 1959. According to figures from the State Security Committee of the LSSR, 13,443 families (31,596 people) were released before December 1962.¹⁶ There are precise data only on the deported in 1949: of 44,271 specially settled,¹⁷ 38,902 were released and 5,231 died *in situ*, but there is no information about their death or release of the remaining 138 people.¹⁸

Although these and other hitherto classified archival sources document the bureaucratic methods of deportation and provide an insight into the actions of the Soviet repressive power structures, this voluminous corpus of evidence does not help historians to reconstruct the very 'event' of deportation, the lives of the deported in settlement and their liberation from it, to say nothing of the deeper human perspective. This is because party and state archives rarely offer the opportunity to look into the deportees' inner world. Individual life experiences are represented more fully in personal sources such as life histories. In our case, rich material is housed in the Oral History Centre of Daugavpils University (OHC).¹⁹ Since its foundation in December 2003, the OHC has organised ten expeditions to Latvian villages and towns, where life stories were recorded mostly from people who until then had never intended to document their experiences in diaries or memoirs. These accounts are either monologues, which might last for several hours, or short dialogues between the narrator and interviewer. They contain different layers and levels of information, among which fragments of past reality appear in today's light.²⁰ In order to draw broader conclusions and ensure the reliability of the material, massive analytical work is required, but this allows us to discern a 'realistic', rather than 'declared', view of the past.²¹ In particular, the reflections are marked by a noble sense of humaneness, a lack of thirst for retribution and a distinct ability to sympathise with the plight of others.

Unfortunately, we do not have recordings of life stories of those people who were already mature adults at the time of the deportations. Most of the available testimonies are from individuals born in the 1920s and 1930s. The narrators came from a generation that grew up in the Latvian independent state, so they had to overcome not only physical suffering, but also had to adapt to an unfamiliar value system in order to survive. At the time of the deportations they were very young, so they remember events more as external manifestations ('*what I saw with my own eyes*'), and to a lesser extent as internal interconnections and meanings. Narrators reveal their own vision of the past, but it is limited to individual human horizons and therefore requires comparison

with other life stories and other types of sources. Hence, this chapter is based on documents in the LNA LVA and on oral history evidence located in the collections of the OHC.²² To reconstruct the past using these materials, I have employed one of the four possible methods, or 'ways', described by Paul Thompson: namely, the 'reconstructive cross-analysis' by which the historian's argumentation is constructed on the basis of information provided by oral history sources.²³ I have included both published and unpublished archival and oral history documents.

Post-Stalinist relaxations and releases

The first changes in the situation of specially settled convicts took place soon after Stalin's death in March 1953. In accordance with the decree 'On Amnesty' issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 27 March 1953, persons who had been convicted for five years started to be released, including some Latvian 'nationalists' whose families had been deported in 1949.²⁴ However, neither the 'nationalists' nor their family members were allowed to return home, although family reunions in special settlements became possible. As a result, even while remaining in captivity, the psychological mood of many deportees began to improve. Little by little, state agencies also relaxed the conditions of those in special settlements. In July 1954, some were permitted to relocate freely within the borders of a specific district, republic or territory and to register with the commandant's office only once a year.²⁵ Until then, they had had to register twice a month and had not been allowed to move outside their district. These new rules provided opportunities for better employment and housing, as well as improved possibilities for education.²⁶

The actual liberation of the deportees began in the mid-1950s. Minors were permitted to return home in 1954, although few took advantage of this concession, because not every family had relatives who were able to accept children, nor were they willing to send children on such an arduous journey alone.²⁷ Additionally, previous experiences with the transport of youngsters out of Siberia to the homeland were quite unsettling. For example, in 1946 and 1947, more than 1,000 children who had been deported in June 1941 were brought back to Latvia, but this did not bring their torments to an end. Many were re-despatched to Siberia in subsequent stages of the deportation process, and those who survived returned to Latvia only in the mid-1950s.²⁸

The experiences of these children are revealed in their memoirs, such as the surviving Skrinda sisters' life stories.²⁹ The Skrinda family

from Daugavpils region was deported to Siberia during the first mass deportation on 14 June 1941. Like most deported families, the father was separated from the family at the railway station. The mother and four daughters were exiled to Krasnoïarsk district, while the father was sent to the Vyatlag labour camp, where he died a year later. After a few months, the youngest sister died of starvation; the others also suffered from hunger and malnutrition. The mother secured employment on a collective farm, but worked in inhumane conditions. In 1946, the three surviving sisters returned to Latvia where they were initially placed in an orphanage, and from there they were sent to reside with relatives. After a while, the mother also went back to Latvia. The family was not re-deported in 1949, but on 29 September 1950 they were arrested for escaping from the special settlement and sent to prison in Daugavpils, then in Riga, Leningrad, Kirov and thence to Siberia. The mother died of cancer in 1956 and the sisters returned home only in the early 1960s.

In accordance with the decision of the USSR Council of Ministers of 24 November 1955, 'On Removing Some Categories of Specially Settled from Registration', academic staff of higher education establishments, deported women who were officially married to those not among the specially settled, single disabled persons, and certain other categories of prisoner, were released.³⁰ They were permitted to reside anywhere in the Soviet Union except for the place from which they had been deported (this ban was finally lifted in 1973). A further decree on 12 March 1956 permitted the disabled and incurably ill to return to their pre-deportation places of residence, although the home journey of these groups was often far from easy. The personal files of Anna Grigorjeva, a disabled woman deported from Daugavpils region, testify to these difficulties: she was not allowed to return home before the majority of the deported families had been released from 'special settlement'.³¹

The Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR eventually granted those people who had been labelled *kulaks* the right to return to Latvia, but each case had to be reviewed individually and a separate decision passed for each one. In 1955, the Council formed a commission that examined deportee requests and complaints, and made recommendations. Using its own resources plus data from local agencies and reports from witnesses, the Ministry of the Interior of the Latvian SSR prepared the materials for the commission. Only in May 1958 did a decree by the Supreme Council of the USSR allow all *kulaks* to return home. But this ruling did not apply to those families who were associated with 'nationalist' organisations or partisan groups. They were finally freed from 'special settlement' in January 1960, but were not given the right to

return to their former homes. For that, each deportee needed to receive individual permission from the authorities of the Latvian SSR. However, liberation from 'special settlement' did not mean rehabilitation, nor did it guarantee a return to Latvia; it merely meant obtaining Soviet citizenship, the opportunity to receive a passport and the relative freedom to decide how to proceed with one's life. Of great importance was whether a person had relatives or friends who could help him or her settle and find a place to live in Latvia.

Release from 'special settlement' was also granted to persons who had been awarded medals like 'For Domesticating the Virgin Lands' or 'Mother's Glory'. Family members were included in this decision. It is surprising that the deported – denied all freedoms and devoid of almost any rights – were simultaneously recognised as worthy of having state awards bestowed upon them. Ritvalds Redzobs was one such deportee who received the 'Virgin Lands' medal in 1957 while in 'special settlement'. In an interview many years later, he and his wife recalled this fact without the least piety, in a quite matter-of-fact way, admitting that the medal had been used to plead for the family's release from exile.³²

Life after release

Most of the former deportees returned to Latvia in 1957–1958. We lack precise overall statistics, but data from various sources range from 22,000 to 'more than 40,000'.³³ It may be discerned from the memories of the former deportees that their life after release was far from easy. People considered several options: return home, move to another region or even reside near their place of 'special settlement'. Some deportees were prevented from returning to their homeland not only by the above-mentioned administrative obstacles and the expected hardships of moving, but for other reasons as well. From their correspondence with relatives and friends, deportees had learned, despite the censorship limitations, of the harm that collectivisation had done to their homeland and of the unbearably tough living conditions on the *kolkhozes* (collective farms) in Latvia. Besides, it was psychologically hard to imagine returning to places where people had undergone traumatic experiences when being brutally driven out of their properties. Yet nostalgia and love for the homeland generally prevailed above all else:

I was summoned [by the *kolkhoz* chairman who did not want to let the family go] and asked: 'Tell me, what do you need?' 'We have everything but our homeland.' Well, then he let us go.

The local people helped us bring everything [to the railway station when leaving]. They said: 'Why don't you stay here with us, eh?' But we replied: 'No, we must go to Latvia!'³⁴

Life stories reveal that released special settlers had to be remarkably energetic and industrious when organising their return home: first, they had to obtain permits from chairmen of Siberian *kolkhozes* to leave their place of work and then seek agreement from officials in Latvia for residence registration in the homeland. Neither was simple. On Siberian *kolkhozes* there was a desperate lack of labour, and chairmen were unwilling to let workers go,³⁵ while the local Latvian authorities feared trouble if they provided residence permits to 'enemies of the people' in their territory. Once they received these permits, deportees who had managed to accumulate some material provisions in eight or nine years of hard labour had to solve vital practical tasks.³⁶ They had to procure a railway cargo container and arrange the transportation of as many of their belongings as possible to Latvia; the rest had to be sold or left to those who stayed behind. Taking into consideration the conditions in Siberia, these tasks were burdensome – arranging transportation often meant people had to cover hundreds of kilometres to the nearest railway station, or they had to wait in queues because there was a lack of both containers and opportunities to send them in the direction needed.

On returning home to the collectivised rural areas, some former deportees realised they were 'wealthy' in comparison to those who had remained in Latvia. It should be mentioned that by 1949, the economically strongest part of the farming population was already weakened as a result of Soviet repression, land reforms and taxation policies. The deportations of March 1949 and the first years of the existence of the collective farms completed the process. The forced collectivisation of agriculture began immediately after the deportations, and continued into the 1950s. In 1948, individual farmsteads comprised 89.8 per cent of Latvian arable land, but by 1950 this figure had dropped to a mere 3.5 per cent.³⁷ In the first period of their existence, the *kolkhozes* faced great difficulties, because state policy was oriented towards their unlimited exploitation.³⁸ Consequently, the rural population in Latvia was driven to such poverty that rather modest material provisions seemed to be luxuries:

We were taken to Siberia without a penny, but when we returned [others] said: 'They've come back wealthy!' We brought bread and money. But how much we had worked to bring something back!

You know, [in Omsk district] everything had been organised for years. *Kolkhozes* had existed for a long time and it was easier for us there. But those who remained in Latvia, they found it very hard. They were short of food even more than us.³⁹

Therefore, returnees often remember their frustration and some even considered going back to their place of deportation, where living conditions in many respects seemed more favourable.⁴⁰ We lack statistics, but there is evidence that some released prisoners, especially younger people, tried and managed to avoid joining the local *kolkhoz*.

Property that was expropriated at the time of deportation became a crucial and contested issue. After having been freed from exile, but not rehabilitated, former deportees were informed that their confiscated property would not be reassigned to them.⁴¹ Many were angered by this and petitioned the authorities, usually unsuccessfully. Only those who could prove that the deportation had been illegal had any chance of getting their property returned. In the best case, the local *kolkhoz* might allow the deportee to buy back his or her former house. But the authorities were rarely that 'liberal', and besides, the deportees' houses had in the meantime often been occupied by new inhabitants or otherwise put to use by various institutions.⁴² However, judging from oral history sources, the problems of housing were solved in different ways: in some cases, previous owners were permitted to live in their former homes, in other cases not, and in making these decisions, a considerable role was played by the local community.⁴³

Other real estate was routinely confiscated. For instance, agriculture buildings were given to *kolkhozes*. Moreover, there was no chance whatever of receiving compensation for livestock and other belongings taken during the deportations. In many instances, local authorities and activists had looted these even before the inventory, and therefore the value of the lost property could not even be estimated properly. As for personal possessions, information is much scarcer, but it appears they did not simply get 'lost'. There is well-founded suspicion that people coveted the belongings of their about-to-be-deported neighbours, as evidenced in several life stories.⁴⁴ For example, a family who at the last moment managed to escape being 'loaded' onto a transport wagon on 25 March 1949 returned home that very day and faced a shocking scene:

Hardly had we come [home] than the house was open, neighbours were sitting there, celebrating ... although they hadn't managed to take anything as yet.⁴⁵

In this case the act of plundering did not take place, but that was unusual. Often when families were deported, their property was forfeited. The deported very seldom mention that after their return they regained their belongings. The Grigorievs were lucky: they had entrusted icons to their relatives and got them back. But the Redzobs family were relieved of golden rings along with other objects.⁴⁶ Who could have taken them but their neighbours?

When we returned home, even newspapers had been torn off the walls. Did they really think that we had gold under those papers? There was nothing else left in the house – it was completely empty, everything looted. Who had done this? Well, our own people, we just hated to think about it.... Do you think we didn't visit our neighbours after our return? We did and saw everything, but we let them be.⁴⁷

Returnees might find friendly people back home, but they might also encounter those who were intolerant towards 'enemies of the people':

Those who had wanted us to be deported wailed that we would come back. Artemiikha, she wept on our return because she had taken [some of our] things ... but good people ... well, Vonogs, our neighbour, an honest man, he gave us a sheep in spring ... and always came to visit us.⁴⁸

After returning to the homeland, the deported often had to face those who had participated in their detention and deportation – local people, who had assisted the repressive organs in March 1949:

When we returned from Siberia, we met [the person who took part in our deportation] ... and he was so uncomfortable.... 'Well, I'm sorry about that, you see ... it was such a tough time then.' I said: 'What happened, happened, no need to remember'.... Everything forgotten, past.⁴⁹

Are the narrator's words supposed to be taken literally? Her own story reveals that what happened is still alive in her memory, and the fear, pain and injury have not disappeared. She has probably forgiven those who hurt her, but in society and especially in historiography there has been no serious evaluation of the collaborators' action. One reason is

that the source base is not rich: the files of the deported families provide the names of the security officers, yet they nearly always lack those of the local collaborators, some of whom voluntarily became involved in the process of deportation. These people were often stricter and more cruel in their treatment of detainees than representatives of the security services. Hence, the memories of the deported are the only source of information about the activities of these citizens.

State policies under Brezhnev and Gorbachev

How were returnees regarded by the ruling authorities in the Latvian SSR in the 1960s and beyond? This important question is still awaiting detailed investigation. Up to now, no official documents indicating the formal restrictions placed on the former deportees, or any other regulations concerning their life after return, have been found. However, there is indirect evidence. For example, working in the archives with the cases of deported families, one can regularly see remarks indicating that state security bodies were secretly monitoring these people.⁵⁰ Empirical material also exists proving that the former deportees or their children were limited to various spheres, although in theory they enjoyed similar rights and advantages as other members of society.

Despite the brutality of the regime and its efforts to control the most 'suspect' behaviours, each deportee had options. If they, or their descendants, persevered in the fight for their own interests and place in society, they often achieved what they desired. The Soviet authorities, even though they looked on them with distrust, did not always put obstacles in their path. This can be explained in various ways from a given 'superior' human subjectivity – that is, some Soviet representatives extended a measure of sympathy to former deportees and supported them – to the objective need to involve the local population in the 'communist construction' process. In real-life situations, it so happened that returnees often pursued successful careers.⁵¹ Some of them joined the Komsomol (the Communist League of Youth) or other official organisations, including the Communist Party. Certainly, the 'smudge in their biography' did not help, but this was frequently overlooked.

At the same time, one cannot help noticing the traumatic experiences that accompanied each deportee, even those who at the moment of deportation were still under age or were born in 'special settlements'. The range of acquired traumas is very wide – from physical (damaged

or ruined health) and psychological (overwhelming sense of fear, insecurity, threat, injustice and sorrow for tragically lost relatives) to social (unjustified loss of status, inability to stand up for one's rights) and cultural (inability to learn the native language, separation from one's culture).

During the Brezhnev period from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, deportations were not discussed openly. Mass deportations were neither condemned nor claimed unlawful; neither were the deportees considered to be victims, to say nothing of public apologies on behalf of the ruling authorities. The regime was unwilling to rehabilitate the victims, and the former deportees were left alone with their traumas. Gradually a new generation who had never heard about these events grew up in Latvia; even the families of the deported often kept silent about it, in order not to hurt the young.⁵² Unfortunately, this generation was devoid of any opportunity to give consolation to their compatriots and help them overcome their bitter resentment. As such, Latvian society was denied the opportunity to hear lessons from history rooted in the former deportees' inner strength and ability to sustain humanity even under merciless circumstances.

Only after the mid-1980s when Gorbachev launched *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* did it become possible to speak openly about Soviet repressions and the question of historical injustice. In the autumn of 1988, the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR adopted a decision acknowledging, for the first time, that the deportations were illegal. Each former deported family was informed of this ruling and received confirmation that the time spent in exile was to be included in the length of employment service.⁵³ On 8 June 1989, the Steering Committee of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR passed the 'Decree on the Rehabilitation of Citizens Deported from the Territory of the Latvian SSR in the 1940s and 1950s'. The first article read as follows: 'Administrative deportations from the territory of the Latvian SSR carried out in the 1940s and 1950s without judicial authorisation are declared illegal and unwarranted, and the citizens themselves are rehabilitated.'⁵⁴

Following the restoration of independence to the Republic of Latvia, the authorities systemically and legally deployed measures to end communist totalitarianism. Together with prosecuting former NKVD agents, they proceeded with truth-seeking and reparations. According to Latvian law, reparations are divided into restitution, rehabilitation, compensation and symbolic measures.⁵⁵ Restitution consists of the return of property and rights. According to the 'Law on the Status of

Persons Subjected to Political Repressions by the Communist and Nazi Regimes',⁵⁶ these people are entitled to compensation for lost property and are guaranteed restitution of their civil, economic and social rights: reduced taxes, social rehabilitation, free medical care, and special regulations regarding pensions and public transport. Measures for rehabilitation were provided in the special 'Law on the Rehabilitation of Persons Unlawfully Subjected to Repression'.⁵⁷

In contrast to Latvian politicians and lawyers who seek a future society based on reconciliation and dialogue between different groups, including former communists and former victims of the communist regime,⁵⁸ the representatives of Soviet totalitarianism have yet to express true remorse for the wrongs committed in the past. On the contrary, time and again, Stalinist apologists 'seriously' reflect on how justified the mass terror and repressions were.⁵⁹ And while this remains so, while people have not turned away in abhorrence from the defenders of these crimes, nobody can feel really secure.

Notes

1. D. Bleiere, 'Repressions Against Farmers in Latvia in 1944–1953', in V. Nollendorfs and E. Oberländer (eds), *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991: Selected Research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia* (Riga, 2005), p. 250.
2. I. Saleniece, 'The Deportation of March 25, 1949 in Latgale: Oral History Sources and Archival Documents', in D. Smith, D. J. Galbreath and G. Swain (eds), *From Recognition to Restoration: Latvia's History as a Nation-State* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 61–75.
3. I. Saleniece, 1949. gada 25. martā izvesto balsis: Dažu Daugavpils un Ilūkstes apriņķa deportēto ģimeņu likteņi mutvārdu vēstures avotos un arhīva dokumentos (Daugavpils, 2008), p. 208.
4. Ibid., pp. 84, 97.
5. J. Riekstiņš, 'Deportēto Latvijas iedzīvotāju atbrīvošana no specnometinājuma (1953–1959)', in A. Caune, I. Feldmanis, H. Strods and I. Šneidere (eds), *Okupācijas režīmi Latvijā 1940–1959. gadā: Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2002. gada pētījumi* (Riga, 2007), p. 585.
6. See Ā. Šilde, *The Profits of Slavery: Baltic Forced Laborers and Deportees under Stalin and Khrushchev* (Stockholm, 1958); O. Freivalds, *Lielā sāpju draudze: Latviešu tautas posta ciešanu un sāpju asinsliecinieki, Kristus ceļa gājēji-mocekļi* (Copenhagen, 1952).
7. See K. Straziņš (ed.), *Latvijas PSR vēsture*, vol. 3 (Riga, 1959), p. 519; A. Drīzulis (ed.), *Latvijas PSR vēsture: No visnenākajiem laikiem līdz mūsu dienām*, vol. 2 (Riga, 1986), p. 241; Ļ. Zīle, *Sociālisma celtniecības vēsturiskais ceļš* (Riga, 1980), p. 92.
8. A. Ivanovs, '1949. gada deportācija Latvijas historiogrāfijā: izpētes gaita, rezultāti un perspektīvas', in I. Feldmanis (ed.), *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti – Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia*, vol. 28 (Riga, 2015).

9. J. Riekstiņš, 'Kulaki' Latvijā, (1940.–1953. gads): Kā varasvīri Latvijā 'kulakus' taisīja un kādas sekas tas radīja: Dokumenti un fakti (Rīga, 1996); J. Riekstiņš, *Ekspropriācija (1940.–1959. gads)* (Rīga, 1998); J. Riekstiņš and A. Kalnciema, *Represijas Latvijas laukos: Dokumenti un materiāli, 1944–1949* (Rīga, 2000); D. Bleiere, 'Represijas pret zemniecību Latvijā 1944.–1953. gadā', in V. Berziņš, A. Caune, I. Feldmanis, H. Strods and I. Šneidere (eds), *Totalitārie režīmi un to represijas Latvijā 1940.–1956. gadā: Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2000. gada pētījumi* (Rīga, 2007); D. Bleiere and J. Riekstiņš, *Latvijas iedzīvotāju otrā masveida deportācija, 1949. gada 25. marts* (Rīga, 2008).
10. H. Strods, *Latvijas nacionālo partizānu karš: Dokumenti un materiāli, 1944–1956* (Rīga, 2003), pp. 535–65. See also K. Kangeris, H. Strods, I. Šneidere, R. Viksne and A. Zunda, *Ārvalstu arhīvu dokumenti par okupācijas režīmu politiku Latvijā, 1940–1968: Dokumentu krājums* (Rīga, 2008), especially document nos. 62 and 64.
11. Riekstiņš, 'Deportēto Latvijas iedzīvotāju atbrīvošana', pp. 576–605.
12. J. Riekstiņš, 'Deportēto Latvijas pilsoņu centieni atgūt zaudēto īpašumu (1953–1959)', in A. Caune, I. Feldmanis, H. Strods and I. Šneidere (eds), *Totalitārie okupācijas režīmi Latvijā 1940.–1964. gadā: Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2003. gada pētījumi* (Rīga, 2007), pp. 513–32.
13. Since 2011, the State Archives of Latvia have formed a structural department of the Latvian National Archives.
14. LNA LVA datu bāze 'Latvijas iedzīvotāju 1949. gada 25. marta deportācija'. <http://www.archiv.org.lv/dep1941/meklesana49.php> (accessed 25 February 2014).
15. *Aizvestie: 1941. gada 14. jūnijs* (Rīga, 2001); *Aizvestie: 1949. gada 25. marts. 1., 2.* (Rīga, 2007).
16. Riekstiņš, 'Deportēto Latvijas iedzīvotāju atbrīvošana', p. 589.
17. In 1949, 211 children were born en route or in exile, 513 people were subsequently deported because they had not been at home or had been in hiding on 25 March, and 1,422 were sent from labour camps to join their deported families in settlements in Siberia.
18. D. Bleiere and J. Riekstiņš, *The Second Mass Deportation of the Inhabitants, March 25, 1949* (Rīga, 2008), p. 57.
19. The main aim of the OHC is to promote theoretical research and the practical use of oral history by creating an archive of oral evidence based on the recorded life histories of the inhabitants of eastern Latvia. By 2014, over 1,000 oral sources had been deposited in the OHC collection.
20. For more information on the interviewing experience, legal and ethical norms, collecting, storage and use of oral history sources at OHC, see I. Saleniece (Saleniece) and Z. Stapkevicha, 'Ustnye materialy v arkhivakh: problemy otbora, chraneniia i dostupa', *Antropologicheskii forum*, no. 17 (2012), pp. 78–83, <http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/017/forum.pdf>.
21. P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, 2000), p. 7.
22. LNA LVA, series no. 1894, sub-series no. 1 (Daugavpils county), piece no. 7639 (case of the family of kulak Fyodor Martinovich Grigoriev); sub-series no. 1 (Ilūkstes county) piece no. 1617 (case of the family of convicted nationalist Kārlis Redzobs); piece no. 2647 (case of the family of convicted nationalist Krišjānis Kalvāns); piece no. 8112 (case of the family of kulak Elisei Mikhailovich Skladov).

23. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, pp. 269–71.
24. *Cīņa*, 28 March 1953.
25. Saleniece, 1949. gada 25. martā izvesto balsis, pp. 223–6, 586.
26. Interview material is cited according to OHC collection name and interview number – in this instance, DU MV, no. 598.
27. Bleiere and Riekstiņš, *The Second Mass Deportation*, pp. 38–9.
28. Sibīrijas bērni: ‘Mums bija tas jāizstāsta...’ Rīga: Fonds ‘Sibīrijas bērni’ [2007]. 1–2. sēj.
29. DU MV, no. 150; DU MV, no. 599.
30. Riekstiņš, ‘Deportēto Latvijas iedzīvotāju atbrīvošana’, p. 588.
31. Saleniece, 1949. gada 25. martā izvesto balsis, pp. 137–83.
32. DU MV, no. 195.
33. Riekstiņš, ‘Deportēto Latvijas iedzīvotāju atbrīvošana’, p. 589.
34. DU MV, no. 195; DU MV, no. 216.
35. DU MV, nos 434, 860, 1027.
36. DU MV, nos 73, 195.
37. Tildes Datorenciklopēdija ‘Latvijas Vēsture’, <http://www.letonika.lv/groups/default.aspx?cid=31694> (accessed 18 October 2014).
38. Bleiere, ‘Repressions Against Farmers’, pp. 248–9.
39. DU MV, no 216.
40. DU MV, nos 401, 1027.
41. Riekstiņš, ‘Deportēto Latvijas pilsoņu centieni’, p. 517.
42. Bleiere and Riekstiņš, *The Second Mass Deportation*, p. 40.
43. DU MV, nos 72, 73, 195, 988; DU MV, nos 150, 216, 599, 1027.
44. DU MV, nos 434, 597, 598, 1027.
45. DU MV, no. 214.
46. DU MV, no. 72; DU MV, no. 216.
47. DU MV, no. 988.
48. DU MV, no. 73.
49. DU MV, no. 195.
50. For example, the inventory control sheet in the Grigoriev family case, LNA LVA, 1894–1 (Daugavpils county), 7639–1, shows that operational staff twice studied the file: first in 1964, in connection with possible links to terrorist acts; and again in 1975, when the son entered the militia and sought acknowledgement of his affiliation with his deported family. It is known that the young person became an officer, despite the ‘dark spots’ in his biography, but we do not know to what extent this factor affected his progress up the career ladder.
51. Among such persons, see G. Ulmanis, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guntis_Ulmanis; S. Kalniete, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandra_Kalniete; and M. Zālīte, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C4%81ra_Z%C4%81l%C4%ABte.
52. DU MV, no. 1027.
53. See the Grigoriev family case in LNA LVA, 1894–1 (Daugavpils county), 7639–231–238.
54. Latvijas PSR Augstākās Padomes Prezīdija 1989. gada 8. jūnija dekrēts ‘Par četrdesmitajos un piecdesmitajos gados no Latvijas PSR teritorijas izsūtīto pilsoņu rehabilitāciju’.
55. I. Švarca, ‘Transitional Justice Mechanisms Applied by Latvia in its Transition from the Communist Regime’, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Law and Politics*, vol. 40 (2012), pp. 80–3.

56. 'Likums par politiski represētās personas statusa noteikšanu komunistiskajā un nacistiskajā režīmā cietušajiem', *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, no. 64 (347), 26 April 1995.
57. 'Likums par nelikumīgi represētu personu rehabilitāciju', *Ziņotājs*, no. 34, 23 August 1990.
58. Švarca, 'Transitional Justice Mechanisms', p. 85.
59. For more information, see <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/sak-kriminalprocesu-par-rubika-izteikumiem-par-1949gada-represijam.d?id=43510235> (accessed 27 July 2014); <http://www.nasha.lv/rus/blog/tags/21/15498.html?user=Deps> (accessed 27 July 2014).

12

The Amnesty and Rehabilitation of Victims of Stalinist Repression in Belarus

Iryna Ramanava

The process of rehabilitation and amnesty of Stalin's victims, and the destiny of those who suffered, are the least investigated themes in modern Belorussian historiography. To a great extent, this can be attributed to the fact that in the second half of the 1990s, when Aleksandr Lukashenko became head of state, official discourse began to promote nostalgia for the Soviet era and call for a return to Soviet ways and values. The collapse of the USSR was interpreted as traumatic. Henceforth, all state academic and research institutes ceased to explore Stalinism and its consequences, and in particular Stalinist repression. Those scholars who continued research in this sphere faced many difficulties, notably the fact that the KGB archive was completely out of bounds. The few publications that did appear from time to time were mostly based on materials prepared in the first half of the 1990s, oral history sources and documents published abroad.¹ In this chapter, I shall attempt to redress the balance by focusing on the confused and tortuous path that rehabilitation took in Belarus in the Soviet era, and shall conclude by examining the legacy of this process for ongoing attempts to achieve justice for Stalin's victims in the years since the end of communist rule in 1991.

Arrests and rehabilitations: a survey

The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was created by the Bolsheviks on 1 January 1919, but was disbanded soon after when its territory was merged into the Lithuanian–Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. The latter was subsequently divided into two parts: a large section of its western province was seized by Poland in the summer of 1919, and the remaining eastern region eventually became the

Belorussian SSR. The republic played both the role of a buffer between the USSR and Poland and a springboard for the export of revolution to the west. At the time of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (1939–1941), the two territories were unified and western Belarus became part of the USSR. It should be mentioned that during the Stalinist repressions of the 1930s, the ‘Polish factor’ played a prominent role in fabricating cases in the BSSR; that is, the main accusations were often based on imagined plots and espionage ordered by the Polish General Staff.

In terms of overall figures, it has been calculated that from November 1917 to April 1953, almost 250,000 people in the BSSR were sentenced by judicial and extra-legal bodies (*dvoikas*, *troikas* and Special Councils), 35,000 of whom were shot. Mass deportations were also directed against so-called *kulaks* at the beginning of the 1930s (approximately 260,000 people) and against policemen, landowners and factory owners, military officials, forestry workers and *kulaks* in the formerly Polish-ruled territories of western Belarus (nearly 120,000 people) in four successive waves of terror during 1940–1941. Thus, the total number of victims of politically motivated repression amounts to approximately 630,000–650,000 people.² These statistics are likely to be incomplete, but there are no other reliable figures available at present in Belarus. Of these 650,000, more than 160,000 people (over 130,000 convicted by judicial and extra-legal bodies, and nearly 30,000 people repressed by administrative measures) were rehabilitated in the territories of Belorussia/Belarus from the mid-1950s to 1993. By 1994, around 60,000 cases involving almost 100,000 people sentenced by courts and military tribunals and nearly 300,000 people exposed to administrative forms of repression had not yet been revised. This was largely because the records from these cases were not available and there was little or no formal documentation. As a result, information had to be gathered incrementally and laboriously from many sources, authorities and witnesses. Hence, in total only roughly one quarter of all Belorussian victims of political repression from the 1920s and 1950s were rehabilitated in the period 1953 to 1993.³ On the basis of various parliamentary and presidential decrees issued in the mid-1990s, the number of rehabilitees had grown to more than 200,000 by the turn of the century, but many cases still remained untouched.⁴

Amnesty and homecoming

As is well known, the majority of convicts were deported to the Gulag labour camps outside the BSSR. Certain categories of prisoners, who had

been exposed to administrative repression, returned to Belarus after the war even before Stalin's death; for example, some *kulak* families were released in accordance with the amnesty of 1947. Deportees transported during the war were also able to make the journey home together with their families, but in practice the process was not as simple as it might seem. Zinaida Tarasevich, Chairperson of the Association of Victims of Political Repressions in Belarus, recalled in 2004 that following her father's demobilisation after the war, he had to apply to Mikhail Kalinin, the chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, with a request to take his family from Okhtama (Arkhangelsk region) to Belarus. However, in spite of receiving a positive response, his wife and daughter actually had to escape from exile.⁵

The first real concerted attempt to release Gulag internees was the so-called 'Beria Amnesty', also mentioned by Marc Elie, Oleg Bazhan and Igor Caşu in their contributions to this volume, which liberated almost half of labour camp prisoners, including substantial numbers of 'ordinary' criminals. In line with the amnesty decree issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on 27 March 1953, roughly 30,000 people returned to Belarus.⁶ Overall, between 1953 and 1956, approximately 17,000 political prisoners convicted of anti-Soviet activity were released and, from 1955, returned to the BSSR, almost one third of whom were sentenced for wartime collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.⁷ Undoubtedly, the return of these convicts caused major headaches for the local authorities. Many officials who had taken part in the organisation and execution of the repressions now not only had to face their victims, but also had to solve the rehabilitees' accommodation and employment problems. A particularly acute issue that aroused deep passions concerned the property of convicts that had been appropriated by other citizens after their arrest. As a result of rising social tensions, in 1956 the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus (CC CPB), K. T. Mazurov, informed Moscow that many Gulag returnees 'resume their criminal activity and try to organise hostile actions against our state, openly express anti-Soviet thoughts, threaten people who participated in their denunciation and even take revenge by committing murder'.⁸

Already in May 1955 the secretary of the Grodno regional party committee, F. Baranov, had warned the Secretary of the CC CPB, M. S. Patolichev, that 'incorrect use' by the procurator's office and court authorities of the 27 March 1953 amnesty had created a situation whereby 'some state criminals [had been] wrongly liberated and had tried to revive anti-Soviet activity, conduct anti-Soviet agitation and

spread defeatist views'. In the same report, Baranov noted that several Belorussian Military District officials were inexplicably 'finding formal reasons to override the guilt of a number of state criminals'.⁹ In light of these and other objections, on 12 December 1956 Mazurov, on behalf of the CC CPB, asked the Central Committee in Moscow to review the early release of those convicted of anti-Soviet activity.¹⁰

Thus, regardless of the widespread amnesty and partial rehabilitations, the authorities' rhetoric remained the same: all returning convicts were considered pardoned or reprieved, but not wrongly accused. In turn, the formerly repressed often became suspicious themselves of the wider public – that is, of those who had not been repressed. The bottom line of all the stories of release and repatriation is mutual misunderstanding, disregard and sometimes palpable anger. Everyone was sure that there was no smoke without fire. Neighbours or colleagues regularly offended returnees by calling them *kulaks*, jailbirds, money-bags or 'justly exiled' enemies. Ex-prisoners recall the difficulties of finding a job or place to study, of reclaiming their home and property confiscated during exile. Maria Shatilo told her tragic story of returning to her native village from where she and her two little sisters and brother had been exiled in 1930. After meeting former fellow villagers, Maria remembers how the *kolkhoz* director told his wife: 'They said no one would be let out. But look! Here they are! And they want everything! And what happens if they are all set free?! What are we going to do?!'¹¹

Among the returnees were priests who, according to Baranov's report cited above, came back 'to their previous residences and began conducting religious services'. There were 12 such clerics in the Grodno region alone.¹² In addition, former victims exerted a profound influence over society by their very presence, encouraging people to analyse the real reasons for, and scale of, the Stalinist-era repressions, based not on government sponsored semi-truths, but on the living examples of parents, relatives, friends and neighbours. It is no surprise, then, that the regional authorities endeavoured to prevent the dissemination of 'anti-Soviet' views by closely monitoring the correspondence and activities of those returnees who remained under local KGB surveillance. In 1957, there were 38 of them in the republic, including 30 in western Belarus. However, the CC CPB considered this level of surveillance to be insufficient and on 20 April 1957 it sought Moscow's permission to create 15 additional KGB departments in Western Belarus.¹³ This was in line with deep-seated official attitudes: after the war, all inhabitants of western Belarus remained politically suspect because, first, they had been citizens of the USSR for only a short period before being occupied by

the Nazis from 1941 to 1944 and, second, it was in this part of Belarus (together with western Ukraine and the Baltic states) that anti-Soviet organisations had supposedly been active for more than ten years since the end of the war.

Rehabilitation in the Khrushchev 'Thaw'

After Stalin's death, certain categories of repressed victims began to be rehabilitated. Special commissions were established in all Soviet republics, including the BSSR, with the aim of revising the cases of those convicted of 'counter-revolutionary crimes'. The activity of these bodies was kept secret. Between September and December 1954, the Presidium of the BSSR Supreme Court revised more than 726 cases involving 806 convicts. However, only 30 cases were declared closed, among them the affair of 13 Belorussian writers who on 5 October 1937 had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for 'active participation in counter-revolutionary activity'. The resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Court stated: 'As can be seen from the case materials, the preliminary and judicial investigation was biased, perfunctory and did not involve additional checks of the events. The sentence was passed based on contradictory and false witness testimonies.'¹⁴ Simultaneously, the KGB authorities started rooting through the archives with the aim of finding 'compromising' materials obtained by illegal interrogation methods. In the BSSR alone, more than 600 secret service personal and working case files and a large number of documents on repatriates and prisoners of war (704,000) were reviewed in this way. However, over the course of five months starting in October 1954, only 36,000 people were cleared for removal from KGB surveillance.¹⁵

Rehabilitation in this period (including posthumous rehabilitation) was a prerogative of the elites: former party and Komsomol (Youth Committee) leaders, top functionaries in Soviet organisations, economic and political workers, and military top brass, the majority of whom were reinstated in the party. Among those rehabilitated in the BSSR in the years 1955–1957 were the former secretaries of the CC CPB, V. G. Knorin and N. F. Gikalo, the disgraced Red Army chief, Ya. B. Gamarnik, and a number of other party-state leaders and prominent social, cultural and scientific figures. A particularly important review took place in 1956 of the falsified evidence used against the leaders of the 'Belorussian National Centre' or 'BNC' (a so-called 'counter-revolutionary rebel and espionage organisation'), as a result of which 161 people had been repressed in 1933–1934 and again in 1937–1939. According to a resolution

issued by the Military Tribunal of the Belorussian Military District, all charges against the 'BNC' were dismissed.¹⁶

Regardless of these examples of rehabilitation, the authorities' actions were not based on the idea of the presumption of innocence. Rather, the 'guilt' of the accused was still taken for granted and it was merely the manner in which the conviction had been secured, in violation of all procedural and constitutional norms, or the formulation of the charges, that was called into question. Thus, the chairman of the KGB, Ivan Serov, wrote a memorandum to the Procurator General of the USSR, Roman Rudenko, concerning case revisions from the period 1920–1930, in which he stated that 'if we take into account all the formal circumstances (the absence of relevant evidence lost during investigation), then this could lead to mistakes and facilitate the release of real criminals'.¹⁷

Meanwhile, rehabilitation remained a highly problematic and complex process. The newly installed review commissions, or individual victims acting on their own behalf or on behalf of deceased family members, could petition to have a case reopened. Procurators and military and state investigators then had to conduct so-called verifications, meaning that full information on the convict had to be gathered, archival documents requested and witnesses (re-)interrogated. Once all this had been undertaken, the Procurator General of the USSR, his deputies or the Chief Military Procurator decided whether to lodge an objection to the original conviction at the USSR Supreme Court. The court, in turn, recommended one of three options: to quash, revise or confirm the original conviction and sentence.¹⁸ Although charges under a number of sub-sections of the notorious Article 58 of the Criminal Code were routinely dropped, convictions based on Article 58–10 ('Anti-Soviet propaganda') were upheld in almost all instances.¹⁹ Hence, in reviews of cases of 'counter-revolutionary activity', it was very rare to find people innocent. In fact, the majority of case reviews did not aim at judicial rehabilitation at all, but at a 're-determination' of the degree of guilt in order to reduce the sentence and justify amnesty or early release. In the BSSR, almost half of applications for review were rejected, the original conviction was overturned in only 10 per cent of cases, and all others underwent 're-determination'.²⁰ Thus, among those cases revised at the end of 1954, 438 people convicted of counter-revolutionary activity had their sentence reduced to five years' imprisonment and, in line with the 'On Amnesty' decree of March 1953, they were released (if they had not been freed already), but the authorities declined to comment on the original conviction. It should be mentioned that such decisions were

often taken by the very same officials who had previously sent 'enemies of the people' to the camps on a mass scale.

In the summer of 1955, K. Kovaleva applied to the Belorussian Ministry of Justice, asserting her innocence. She had been sentenced to eight years' hard labour by the Supreme Court of the BSSR on 27 September 1947, because 'she slandered Soviet reality, the authorities and the government'. The investigation had been based on a personal confession and the sentence was typical of those times. In 1954, the Presidium of the Supreme Court reduced the sentence to six years' imprisonment – that is, the period which Kovaleva had already spent in prison. However, in effect, the Presidium decision confirmed her guilt.²¹ In 1956, V. Savtsov, who had been convicted in March 1953 for 'anti-Soviet agitation' (he had 'praised foreign equipment and slandered Soviet state organisations') was released. But he was set free on the following grounds: 'When taking the decision about his liberation the Commission took into account the character of his crime, his participation in the war, and his good behaviour and hard-working personality.' Thus, despite the absurd accusation, Savtsov's release did not represent rehabilitation in the sense of formal acquittal and recognition of his innocence, but was justified by his 'good behaviour'.²²

Another example is that of K. Izrailskii, who was sentenced in 1952 to ten years' forced labour with property confiscation for 'anti-Soviet nationalist activity' and 'libeling the national policy of the Soviet government'. Based on the 'On Amnesty' decree of 27 March 1953, Izrailskii was released from labour camp, but at his case review in December 1953, his guilt was reaffirmed by the BSSR Supreme Court. However, the crime was 're-determined' and the sentence reduced to five years' imprisonment. On 4 February 1955, the case was re-examined yet again by the plenum of the USSR Supreme Court following a protest by the Procurator General. The plenum concluded that 'witness testimonies cast doubt [on Izrailskii's claim to innocence], but even if some of them were true, Izrailskii's comments were petty and did not include any counter-revolutionary intent'. As a result, the case was dropped and the conviction was not upheld.²³

The majority of case reviews and rehabilitations were carried out after the famous 20th Party Congress in February 1956 and the formation of special republican commissions of the Supreme Court – mostly on the basis of requests and petitions from individuals. In the second half of 1956 and again in the first half of 1961, over 30,000 cases involving more than 50,000 people were revised in the BSSR, and nearly 40,000 Belorussians were rehabilitated. The rehabilitation of those

convicted by extra-legal bodies was conducted by the military tribunals of the Belorussian Military District.²⁴ Other military and judicial organs involved in the rehabilitation process included the military procuracy and the military collegium of the USSR Supreme Court. In the period 1954–1961, more than 20,000 Belorussian citizens were rehabilitated by these organs. However, after 1962, all work on rehabilitation in effect ceased. Thus, 14 people were rehabilitated in 1968, only one in 1970, 21 in 1983 and 26 in 1986.²⁵

Retrial of cases: rehabilitation in the late 1980s and early 1990s

This situation changed, albeit gradually, after Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985 and launched his new policy of ‘openness’ or *glasnost*. A decree issued by the Politburo on 11 July 1988 clumsily entitled ‘On Additional Measures Aimed at Completing the Rehabilitation of All Those Wrongly Accused’ stipulated that case reviews had to be conducted even in instances where the authorities had received no petitions or complaints.²⁶ Consequently, not only were a number of famous show trial verdicts revisited, such as that of Nikolai Bukharin, but also the cases of up to 1 million ordinary Soviet citizens wrongly convicted during the Stalin era. During this new round of investigations, it was discovered that previously not all the accused had been fully rehabilitated. This meant that cases revised in the 1950s and 1960s had to be re-examined once again, a massively time-consuming business. Nevertheless, the revisions were still undertaken on the basis of the defendants’ presumed guilt. Indeed, criminal case files contained much evidence of the guilt of the accused, but this ‘information’ was mostly the result of false confessions given under pressure. The variability of sentencing required corresponding legislation, and it took much time and effort to overcome entrenched thinking and assumptions. As one official involved in the revision of Bukharin’s case said: ‘Put simply, a number of accusations were made [at his trial]. No facts or evidence were produced. We have nothing that can be used to disprove these things.’²⁷

The new wave of political rehabilitation in the BSSR in the late 1980s started with the re-examination of the ‘Belarus Liberation Union’ (BLU) case, during which 108 active leaders of Belorussian science and culture, as well as state officials who had helped to found the original Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, were arrested in the spring and summer of 1930, and accused of nationalist propaganda and counter-revolutionary,

anti-Soviet activity. Most of them were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment or exile, and in 1937–1941 they were re-arrested and were either shot or died in labour camps. Those who survived were re-arrested for a third time in 1949–1952 and condemned to eternal exile in Siberia. The initial review of this case took place in 1958, but on 10 June 1988 the Commission of the BSSR Supreme Court stated that the materials ‘did not contain any direct evidence that demonstrated the existence of the counter-revolutionary organisation, the Belarus Liberation Union’.²⁸ Two years later, V. Ignatovskii, the first President of the Belorussian Academy of Sciences who had been involved in the BLU case and who had committed suicide in 1931, was rehabilitated and posthumously reinstated in the party.²⁹ It also took more than 30 years (1955–1989) to rehabilitate all 2,570 people convicted in the 1937–1938 case against the so-called ‘United Anti-Soviet Underground’, which had been falsified by the NKVD.³⁰ Regardless of the creation of special commissions, rehabilitation in Belarus was protracted and slow. According to a prominent member of the Politburo commission set up to study materials related to Stalinist repression: ‘If in the Baltic states there is a tendency to rehabilitate everyone, in Belorussia ... practical implementation is very weak, but social pressure is extremely strong.’³¹

Community activation

To be sure, social pressure in the late 1980s was huge. On 3 June 1988, the Belorussian writers’ weekly newspaper *Litaratura i Mastatstva* (‘Literature and Art’) published an article entitled ‘Kuropaty – the Road to Death’ by Zenon Pozniak and Evgenii Shmygalev. The main topic of the article was the excavation carried out by archaeologists of the Historical Institute of the BSSR Academy of Sciences at Kuropaty on the outskirts of Minsk. These excavations proved the claims of older residents about mass executions of Soviet citizens in 1937–1941.³² Although the writers’ journal had a small circulation, the article gained plenty of attention and the editorial staff received a large number of letters from readers. Within days, other articles appeared in various Soviet papers and journals on similar themes. Kuropaty became famous throughout the USSR and later all over the world. In the course of the investigation, 510 graves were discovered, extending over nearly 30 hectares. As a result of the selective exhumation, such objects as human remains, personal belongings, shells and bullets were uncovered. Fifty-five witnesses from nearby villages and several representatives of the NKVD testified to the executions there. The first investigation of the case finished in

November 1988 and the death toll was given as 30,000 people. As such, the 'struggle for Kuropaty' was crucial for understanding the Stalinist legacy not only in Belarus, but throughout the USSR.

On 30 October 1988 (All Saints' Day or *Dzyady*), tens of thousands of people congregated at Kuropaty to honour the memory of the victims. It was one of the first mass protests in the Soviet Union. However, the event, aimed at exposing Stalinist crimes, was broken up by internal military forces, causing discontent among the local population. It was this memorial meeting that laid the foundations for the creation of the Belorussian People's Front – *Adradzhenne* – headed by Pozniak.³³ As a site of mass Stalinist repression, in 1993 the Kuropaty district was included in the list of historical and cultural sites of the Republic of Belarus. However, later in the 1990s, the original investigation into Kuropaty was reviewed twice on the unsubstantiated grounds that it contained the remains of German invaders or that it was the place of mass extermination of Jews.³⁴ At present, there is no monument to the victims shot there, even though it could be erected with minimal effort by the state, but there are many wooden crosses. In spite of the fact that these crosses are often vandalised, the site has become an important place of national memorialisation.

Rehabilitation as a mass phenomenon

The main stimulus accelerating the rehabilitation process was the long-awaited decree issued by the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet on 16 January 1989 on the rehabilitation of all those repressed by the extra-legal bodies, the *troikas* and Special Councils. The initial plan was to finish the rehabilitations by 1990, and indeed in the BSSR, the process was practically completed in this time frame.³⁵ In the course of 1989, 35,486 cases were revised and 53,684 people were fully rehabilitated, almost one quarter of them posthumously.³⁶ However, there were a further 174,010 case files involving 281,896 people in the archives of the Belorussian KGB and in spite of this, by the beginning of 1991, only 100,522 people had been rehabilitated.³⁷ The number of cases of those sent into exile for national, religious or political motives was not calculated.³⁸ Case reviews not covered by the Supreme Soviet decree were carried out according to an order issued by the Procurator General of the USSR and the Chairman of the KGB on 30 July 1988. This directive stipulated that investigations and checks should be undertaken in those cases where new circumstances had come to light. This often involved the re-interrogation of witnesses and study of archival documents.³⁹ For

instance, during the case review of the driver of a Minsk industrial trust, V. A. Bogdanovich, and 16 other people accused with him of espionage and anti-Soviet activity in the 1930s, 75 people who had known them before their arrest were interrogated, 20 of them being questioned as witnesses. Sixty-three other criminal cases were consulted, as well as many documents from government and departmental archives. As a result, the charges against all 17 people (six of whom had been shot) were dismissed.⁴⁰

A similar case was that of the family of Janina Zhirmont-Zhurovskaia. In 1956, the family had decided to use the opportunities of the Khrushchev 'Thaw' to leave Kazakhstan, where they had been exiled before the war, and move to Poland (as a number of Janina's fellow citizens had already done under a population exchange agreement reached between Poland and Belarus after the borders were permanently redrawn in 1945). However, Janina and her mother got out of the train in Brest and headed for their home town of Ruzhany, while her father and her brother's family went to Poland. In the 1990s, Janina asked her daughter-in-law, who was a lawyer, to help her reclaim the confiscated family house and deal with questions of rehabilitation and compensation. The daughter-in-law discovered archival documents that stated that, according to a decision taken by the Brest regional executive committee on 30 September 1955, Vatslav Zhurovskii's household had been wrongly classified as *kulak* and therefore on 20 January 1956 it was resolved that his family could return to Ruzhany. However, the Zhurovskis learned about that decision only in 1992. Until then, they had lived with the idea that their residence in this part of Belarus, where they had returned on 7 January 1957, was illegal because they did not possess the right papers.⁴¹

Amnesty and rehabilitation of collaborators

A separate category of convicts comprised those accused of collaboration with the occupiers (in different forms) during the Second World War. As also mentioned by Bazhan and Caşu in their contributions to this volume, many 'collaborators' were released under an amnesty in September 1955, but this did not apply to those convicted of murder and torture.⁴² A number of Belarussians had indeed taken part in the worst kinds of Nazi atrocities or had betrayed their fellow citizens to the German authorities. However, among the 'collaborators' were also many people who had simply worked as school teachers or headmasters in the occupation years or had been members of the Nazi-sponsored

Belorussian national youth organisation. The 16 January 1989 Soviet decree discussed above did not include traitors to the Motherland, Nazi criminals, participants in nationalist 'bandit groups' and their supporters. Indeed, by the end of the 1990s, approximately 60,000 people in the BSSR had been refused rehabilitation for crimes committed during the war.⁴³ This high refusal rate – nearly 40 per cent – can be explained by two main factors: first, many of those convicted under counter-revolutionary articles of the Criminal Code in 1944–1953 were still regarded as real traitors in contrast to the victims of the falsified trials in 1937–1938; and second, their cases had been re-examined in the late 1950s and then again in the 1990s based on documents prepared by the Procurator's Office and the KGB, who in turn held preconceived, often negative, attitudes towards so-called 'collaborators'.⁴⁴ That said, according to the Vice Chairman of the BSSR KGB, G. Lavitskii, there was no strict definition of 'which actions in particular should be classified as collaboration',⁴⁵ and the whole question of the rehabilitation of 'collaborators' remained a matter of intense controversy throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

The question of material compensation

On 29 December 1990, the Council of Ministers adopted, for the first time in the history of Soviet Belorussia, a resolution granting material compensation and social benefits to victims of Stalinist repression.⁴⁶ Compensation for lost property and time spent on compulsory labour projects presupposed a great deal of prior investigative work and hence, despite the resolutions, the process proceeded very slowly.⁴⁷ Moreover, restitution of confiscated property was to be carried out on the basis of contemporary documents, inventories, legal acts and other official materials, but nearly 40 per cent of applicants did not possess such documents, which in turn required further time-consuming investigations.⁴⁸ There were also several anomalies. For example, Ts. P. Trushkina, a citizen of Minsk, applied to the state security authorities to receive compensation for property confiscated in 1929 after her father's arrest. The case review revealed that the appropriation had indeed taken place, but in the course of the interrogation of her relatives and fellow villagers, it was disclosed that the property had been allocated to the local agricultural commune, which by the early 1990s had ceased to exist.⁴⁹ In 1989, Maria Shatilo attempted to gain compensation for her parents' house seized in 1930, but the Procurator of Minsk region said: 'There are no documents on the confiscation of your father's property' and

she was advised to find witnesses to testify that she had been sent into exile. Shatilo recalls:

So, right away we went round there [to her neighbours]. They said that we could have taken the property with us, that nobody wanted to confiscate it. But how could we have done that when we were being persecuted?! I went to look for witnesses, but they said they had seen nothing as it had been at night. Nobody wanted to testify.⁵⁰

According to the December 1990 resolution, all rehabilitees were granted a range of benefits such as free passes for public transport; a 50 per cent discount on medicines; priority rights for dental treatment and services in hospitals and clinics; health resort vouchers; and rights to install telephones and receive fuel for those living in private houses. In December 1991, the Belarus Supreme Soviet extended these privileges to children who had been in exile, prison or special settlements with their parents, or who had been born in captivity. In cases where documents that related to property confiscation no longer existed, claimants were to receive financial compensation amounting to 5,000 roubles. This sum was increased in November 1992 to ten times the minimum salary.⁵¹ Thus, in 1993, the review commission finally decided to give Maria Shatilo financial compensation for the illegal confiscation of her father's property in 1930 to the tune of ten times the minimum salary plus a double minimum salary for her and her mother and father, in recognition of their rehabilitation. However, compensation payments at the beginning of the 1990s were carried out in times of hyperinflation. Recipients complained that the amounts were ridiculous: 'you could only buy slippers for that sum', or 'a bottle of vodka'. Maria commented:

They sent me 2,000 [roubles] for my father's death, but when it arrived I could buy nothing. It was a mockery! Firstly, they promised the money, then I had to wait four years for it and now what can I buy? A boot? We used to have two cows, horses and loads of farm machinery.⁵²

These benefits, regardless of their miserly character, gave great moral satisfaction to former Stalinist victims, but they did not last long, being abruptly cancelled in 1995. Resentment against the authorities was increased by the fact that, at the same time, those who had been taken prisoner and deported to Nazi Germany as forced labourers during the Second World War began to receive payments from the

Berlin government, first in Deutschmarks and then in Euros.⁵³ The sums involved were well in excess of ten times the minimum salary in Belarus – the amount offered to former victims of Stalinist terror before payments stopped in 1995.

Conclusion

The rehabilitation process in Belarus, as throughout the USSR, was long and tortuous. The very concept of rehabilitation altered markedly from the 1950s to the 1990s. It was originally considered a behind-the-scenes judicial act, unaccompanied by public announcements or material compensation and benefits, and often merely amounting to a reduction in sentence rather than an acquittal or confirmation of innocence. At the beginning of the 1990s, the idea of rehabilitation included not only liberation from penal servitude (this had already been achieved), but the formation of an objective political assessment of the past and the establishment of open governmental mechanisms for restoring the good name and property to those, both alive and dead, who had been wrongly accused and repressed. The scope and transparency of rehabilitation had already been extended greatly in the last two years of the Soviet Union with the issuing of a number of new decrees. The process in Belorussia broadly mirrored that in the other All-Union republics and with the fall of the USSR in 1991, new mechanisms and procedures were required to expand the process. However, since the middle of the 1990s these processes have been curtailed, and the memorialisation of the victims of Stalinist repression is now the task of lone enthusiasts.

Notes

1. See, for example, I. Ramanava, 'Reabilitacyya ahvyar palitychnyh represii u 1950-ya gady: asnounyya tendencyii i etapy', *Belaruskі gіstarychny chasopis*, no. 3 (2014), pp. 15–23; I. Ramanava, 'Reabilitacyya ahvyar palitychnyh represii u kancy 1980-h pachatku 1990-h gadou: asnounyya tendencyi', *Belaruskі gіstarychny chasopis*, no. 6 (2014), pp. 10–20; I. Ramanava, 'Adaptatsiia represirovannykh k zhizni v obshchestve posle vozvrasheniia iz mest zakliucheniia i ssylki (po materialam interv'iu)', in I. Takala, A. Golubev, I. Ramanava and I. Makhovskaia (eds), *Ustnaia istoriia v Karelii. Vyp. IV. Kareliia i Belarus': povsednevnaia zhizn' i kul'turnye praktiki naseleniia v 1930–50-e gg.* (Petrozavodsk, 2008), pp. 31–52; S. Homich, 'Amnisciravanne i reabilitacyi represavanyh u Belaruskai SSR (sakavik 1953 – lyuty 1956 gg.)', in V. Andreev (ed.), *Repressivnaia politika sovetskoі vlasti v Belarusi: sbornik nauchnikh. rabot. Vyp. 1.* (Minsk, 2007), pp. 254–69; U. Navicki, 'Drugaja

- hvalia palitychnaj reabilitacyi u Belarusi: składanasci viartannia z zabyccia bylyh "naccemau" (1987–1990)', in *Institut belorusskoi kultury i stanovlenie nauki v Belarusi* (Minsk, 2012), pp. 435–40.
2. These statistics are drawn from U. Adamushka, *Palitychnyya represii 20–50-h gadou na Belarusi* (Minsk, 1994), pp. 9–10; and A. Chackiewicz, 'Aresztowania i deportacje społeczeństwa zachodnich obwodów Białorusi (1939–1941)', in M. Giżejewskiej and T. Strzembosza (eds), *Spółeczeństwo białoruskie, litewskie i polskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej (Białoruś Zachodnia i Litwa Wschodnia) w latach 1939–1941* (Warsaw, 1995), p. 137.
3. Adamushka, *Palitychnyya represii*, p. 145.
4. National Archive of the Republic of Belarus (NARB), f. 968, op. 1, d. 4114, l. 1; A. Dziarnovich (ed.), *Reabilitacya. Zbornik dokumentau i narmatyunyh aktau pa reabilitatsii ahvyarau palitychnyh represiyau 1920–1980'h gadou na Belarusi* (Minsk, 2001), p. 145; *Encykłapedyya gistoryi Belarusi u 6 t. T.6, kn.1* (Minsk, 2001), p. 175.
5. Ramanava, 'Adaptatsiia repressirovannykh k zhizni', p. 35.
6. NARB, f. 4-p, op. 62, d. 367, ll. 122–3.
7. Ibid., d. 444, l. 512; A. N. Aristov, A. A. Kosakovskiy, V. P. Naumov and I. N. Shevchuk (eds), *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie material v 3-kh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2000), p. 259 (henceforth: *Reabilitatsiia 1, Reabilitatsiia 2, Reabilitatsiia 3*).
8. NARB, f. 4-p, op. 62, d. 444, ll. 512, 514.
9. Ibid., d. 427, ll. 255, 261, 265.
10. Ramanava, 'Adaptatsiia repressirovannykh k zhizni', p. 38.
11. Ibid., pp. 35–43 (here p. 38).
12. NARB, f. 4-p, op. 62, d. 427, l. 259.
13. M. Kostiuk (ed.), *Gistoryia Belarusi u 6 t. T.1 Belarus u 1946–2009* (Minsk, 2011), p. 200.
14. NARB, f. 99, op. 6, d. 232, ll. 2, 5, 6.
15. NARB, f. 4, op. 62, d. 428, ll. 147, 149.
16. *Encykłapedyya gistoryi Belarusi u 6 t. T. 1* (Minsk, 1993), pp. 450–1.
17. *Reabilitatsiia 2* (Moscow, 2003), pp. 244–5.
18. *Reabilitatsiia 1*, p. 9.
19. V. N. Uimanov, 'Kampaniia massovoi reabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh represii v zapadnoi Sibiri v seredine 1950–1980-e gody', *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, no. 2 (2012), p. 95.
20. *Reabilitatsiia 1*, p. 213.
21. Homich, 'Amnisciravanne i reabilitacyi represavanyh u Belaruskai SSR', p. 260.
22. NARB, f. 4-p., op. 62, d. 444, l. 201.
23. NARB, f. 99, op. 6, d. 240, ll. 134–7.
24. Adamushka, *Palitychnyya represii*, p. 142.
25. Kostiuk (ed.), *Gistoryia Belarusi u 6 t. T. 6*, p. 202; *Reabilitatsiia 3* (Moscow, 2004), p. 590.
26. *Reabilitatsiia 3*, p. 97.
27. Ibid., p. 51.
28. NARB, f. 4-p. op. 156, d. 778, l. 46. The case file 'BLU' comprises 29 volumes. See *Encykłapedyya gistoryi Belarusi u 6 t. T. 6, kn. 1*, p. 249.
29. Navicki. 'Drugaja hvalia palitychnaj reabilitacyi u Belarusi', pp. 438–40.

30. *Encyklopedyya gistoryi Belarusi u 6 t. T. 6, kn. 1*, p. 23.
31. *Reabilitatsiia* 3, p. 210.
32. Z. Pozniak and E. Shmygalev, 'Kurapaty – doroga smerci', *Litaratura i Mastatsva*, 3 June 1988.
33. The BPF was a socio-political movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s which aimed to reorganise the political system and revive the Belarussian nation on democratic and humanist principles, its ultimate goal being state independence for Belarus. Later in the 1990s and 2000s, it became an opposition party.
34. 'Pavel Yakubovich o meste Kuropat v obshchestvennom soznanii', *Sovetskaiia Belorussiia*, 29 October 2009, accessed on <http://news.tut.by/society/151147.html>.
35. *Reabilitatsiia* 3, p. 345.
36. NARB, f. 4-p, op. 156, d. 743, ll. 20–1.
37. *Reabilitatsiia* 3, p. 584.
38. NARB, f. 968, op. 1, d. 4113, l. 28.
39. NARB, f. 4-p, op. 156, d. 743, l. 22.
40. *Ibid.*, d. 623, ll. 33–4.
41. Ramanava, 'Adaptatsiia repressirovannykh k zhizni', pp. 35–6.
42. *Reabilitatsiia* 1, p. 259.
43. E. Spasiuk, *Belarus' pochtila pamiat' zhertv stalinskikh repressii*, http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2007/01/31/ic_articles_116_149542/print.
44. J. Karaleu, 'Ab realnyh mashtabah stalinskikh represij u Belarusi', *Arche*, no. 5 (2014), p. 49.
45. *Reabilitatsiia* 3, p. 587.
46. *Sbornik normativnykh dokumentov po vosstanovleniiu prav grazhdan, postradavshikh v khode politicheskikh repressii 1920–1980 godov* (Minsk, 1991), pp. 37–40.
47. *Reabilitatsiia* 3, p. 184.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 173–4.
49. NARB, f. 4-p, op. 156, d. 623, l. 36.
50. Ramanava, 'Adaptatsiia repressirovannykh k zhizni', p. 51.
51. Dziarnovich (ed.), *Reabilitacya*, pp. 102–4, 115, 121.
52. Ramanava, 'Adaptatsiia repressirovannykh k zhizni', p. 50.
53. On the compensation paid by Germany since the late 1990s to former forced labourers in the Nazi war economy, see also the introduction to this volume, p. 6.

13

Afterword: Stalinist Rehabilitations in a Pan-European Perspective

Miriam Dobson

With the 'memory boom' of the past two decades, there has developed a rich historiography on how post-war societies – at least in Western Europe – dealt collectively with the violence and political extremism of the mid-20th century.¹ Scholars from a variety of different disciplines have discussed what 'coming to terms' with the past can mean for both individuals and for national communities.² In 1945, violence did not instantaneously disappear from the continent, but the cataclysms of the previous six years have not been repeated, and it has been possible to see the barbarity of those years as a chapter in European history that has now been overcome.³ In his masterful *Postwar*, Tony Judt begins with evocative scenes of 'utter misery and desolation', with refugees, returning POWs and former prisoners all poignant reminders that traditional, pre-war communities had been shattered. Judt writes: 'Photographs and documentary films of the time show pitiful streams of helpless civilians trekking through a blasted landscape of broken cities and barren fields.'⁴ The emotional impact of these images on the contemporary viewer is possible precisely because Europeans have come to see such scenes as part of a remote and distant past.

It is perhaps not accidental that Judt begins his account of the 'post-war' with the displaced person. According to Pieter Lagrou, the actual experiences of the Second World War were, in Western Europe, highly diverse, and unlike in the First World War, there was no common experience of violence on which to base a post-war consensus. But in their quest for some kind of unity, post-1945 societies groped for symbols of commemoration which could cohere their diverse experience of war. The resistance fighter – briefly heroised in 1945 – was found wanting, and by the late 1940s, the 'concentration camp survivor' had taken his place. Lagrou argues that while the actual proportion of the West

European population who had been displaced to Germany (whether that be as 'POWs, workers, Jews, political prisoners, [or] collaborationist refugees') was relatively small, their homecoming was used as an emblem of society's own return (or attempted return) to normalcy. Deportees embodied 'a discourse of national martyrdom ... better than any other group', and concentration camp survivors did so especially powerfully. This vision of the war was, in Lagrou's words, 'artificially unanimous', but reflects a widespread desire to find, or construct, a shared past that could anchor society.⁵

Perhaps surprisingly, we see quite similar patterns in West Germany. Here, POWs returning from the Soviet Union could play a similar symbolic function: as victims of totalitarianism, suggests Robert Moeller, their ordeal could be paralleled with that of Jewish victims of genocide, thus bolstering a vision of ordinary Germans as victims rather than perpetrators.⁶ Frank Biess's study of returnees confirms POWs' importance to the emerging discourses of national identity in the Federal Republic of Germany, but argues that an evolution occurred over the course of this first decade. He makes a nuanced distinction between victims and survivors: at first POWs were dehumanised and demoralised victims of totalitarianism, but as West Germany recovered from the worst devastation of the war, the POW who had survived Soviet captivity, sometimes as a result of a religious conversion, came to symbolise certain German values (including Christianity). They represented the nation's 'spiritual renewal'.⁷

The fixation on the returnee reflects a widespread desire for consensus in politics, particularly in the first post-war decade. In time, however, this narrative would also be found wanting.⁸ In a recent article, Samuel Moyn points to the problematic nature of a war narrative that focused on the concentration camp rather than the extermination camp: it implicitly silenced the experience of Jews, and did not fully acknowledge the radical nature of the Nazi regime.⁹ Moyn argues, as have others, that it was particularly in the decade which followed Eichmann's trial in 1961 that narratives of the war were radically re-written. A younger generation became increasingly vociferous in their criticism of their parents' complicity in the horrors of the war. This was particularly true in West Germany, where a widespread desire to see ordinary Germans as 'victims' gave way to a painful and divisive recognition of collective guilt. By the 1970s it seemed as if, in both West Germany and indeed across much of the western world, there had developed an almost insatiable appetite for works of art and scholarship about the Holocaust, and about the extermination camps in particular.¹⁰ But the 'memory' of the

war was still in flux, and still contentious. Describing the years running up to the 50th anniversary of the war's end, Robert Moeller wrote that the 'pasts of German victims and pasts of the victims of Germans were still vying for space and recognition in public consciousness'.¹¹

But how does all this bear on Eastern Europe and the studies presented in this volume? I begin by making a comparison between Western and Eastern Europe because it highlights certain issues that warrant reflection. First, it is worth remembering that in the second half of the 20th century, it was not only communist regimes, and their successors, that had to reckon with a violent past, to find ways to understand past cruelty and suffering, and to construct socially cohesive narratives of the past. Second, the process was often not a straight-forward one and could evolve over time, with quite distinct phases. Even after several decades of reckoning with the past, new accounts of the crimes committed during the Second World War can prove contentious. Third, the returnee himself or herself could become a symbol of the nation's violent heritage and of its recovery. As such, he could represent different interpretations of that past: he might be used to reaffirm a collective sense of victimhood; or, through the act of survival, he might become a figurehead for the nation's resurrection.

In many ways, then, the process of rehabilitation and overcoming the legacies of extreme political violence were not unique to the countries of Eastern Europe in the post-war period. There are, however, important distinctions to be made; and some common patterns that seem to apply across the communist bloc, but less so elsewhere. While 1945 marks at least a caesura of sorts for Western Europe, it was a more problematic break in the countries to the east of what would soon to be called the 'Iron Curtain'. Here there was no retreat from state, or mass, violence, but in fact the beginning of a new cycle. In the Soviet Union, many citizens hoped that the post-war era would see some relief from the severity of the pre-war Stalinist system, but they were soon disappointed: the prison camp system grew to an unprecedented size in these years as a result of the introduction of extremely harsh punishments for relatively minor criminal offences, and the last five years of Stalin's rule saw a return to political repression.¹²

In most of the countries of Eastern Europe, the newly established communist governments used show trials and arrests to curb their political rivals, both real and imaginary.¹³ This post-war violence meant that there was no interruption to a period of extreme political violence which had begun around 1930 and stretched through to 1953, even if it took different forms. In the USSR in particular, the 1930s saw the

most extensive repressive measures – de-kulakisation, mass operations and the Great Terror of 1936–1938 – but the arm of Soviet political terror stretched into Eastern Europe with the arrests of exiled communists and anti-fascists, already creating one important body of potential rehabilitees for the post-Stalin era (as discussed in the chapters on East Germany and Bulgaria, respectively). Resulting in huge dislocation and conflict, the Second World War generated new cohorts of victim: POWs (as already suggested, a common European phenomenon), and, as occupation came to an end, a suspect cast of collaborators. There were also new forms of violence specific to the eastern bloc: as the Soviet state took over new territories in what Timothy Snyder has called the ‘bloodlands’ – first in 1940–1941 and then again from 1944 – it used mass deportations to combat any existing or potential resistance, and in so doing created a large cast of victims (as discussed in the chapters on Moldavia, Latvia, Belarus and Poland).¹⁴ In the post-Stalin era, therefore, the prisons and camps, not to mention the cemeteries, of the USSR and Eastern Europe contained the bodies of women and men who had been victims of very diverse kinds of state violence over a period of more than 20 years.

It was thus only in 1953, with Stalin’s death, that a decisive break in the cycle of violence came. Only now did the communist leaders begin to seek new forms of legitimacy that would not depend on the regular use of terror tactics. They began, almost as one, to undo some of the injustices of the past, allowing the release of prisoners, which brought about an often dramatic reduction in the size of the incarcerated populations. As the chapters of this volume show, there were certain common patterns to how this occurred. Amnesty was one widely used tool for rapidly freeing large numbers of prisoners at a stroke of the pen, though it did nothing to address the rights and wrongs of the initial sentence, and many beneficiaries continued to lobby for legal rehabilitation after their release. At the same time, rehabilitation commissions were created in most countries and cases began to be reviewed. The rates of change varied somewhat from country to country: for example, Poland, Piotr Kłodoczny argues, was rather slow in following the cues for reform emanating from Moscow; Hungary’s leadership rather more enthusiastic, Andrea Pető suggests, as a result of Imre Nagy’s appointment as Prime Minister in July 1953. And there would be important differences later on: the Prague Spring of 1968 brought about a new wave of rehabilitations when other countries were already pulling back from the process. But the starting point for all was Stalin’s death, and the years 1954–1955 saw significant changes in the treatment of victims,

even before Khrushchev's 'secret speech' of 1956. And almost universally there was a slowing, or even reversal, of the rehabilitation process in the 1970s, before a new burst of activity in the late 1980s, often with a significant input from civic groups prompting and accelerating state initiatives. The dismantling of the communist party apparatus led to new campaigns to rehabilitate and commemorate communism's victims, but even now such processes were, in some cases, slow (in Bulgaria, Jordan Baev notes, it took at least 15 years to complete) or contentious (in the chapter on Belarus, Iryna Ramanava observes that the identification of the remains found at Kuropaty has been contested, and the wooden crosses placed there vandalised). While the process of rehabilitation had country-to-country variation, it seems as if across Eastern Europe it followed a broadly similar chronology – and one that was distinct from that of Western Europe.

In tracing a story that stretches from 1953 until at least 1989 if not beyond, the chapters in this volume thus stress the protracted nature of the rehabilitation process. Another common feature is their tendency to highlight the haphazard nature of the commissions' work and the limited nature of 'rehabilitation'. In the USSR, as Marc Elie shows, cases were reviewed, but there was no new procedure for rehabilitation, even for those who had been sentenced by extra-judicial punitive bodies now declared illegal and dissolved. Often the same men – and they invariably were men – who had been in power and directed state terror were given responsibility for overcoming its legacies. Sometimes this occurred quite literally: Iosif Mordovets, for example, mentioned in Igor Cașu's chapter, had been a provincial NKVD boss at the height of the terror, but also served on Moldavia's rehabilitation commission in the early post-Stalin era. This kind of continuity in personnel between the era of Stalinist terror and de-Stalinisation itself helped to ensure that perpetrators were rarely brought to justice. In Moscow, Beria was scapegoated and some of his associates were arrested alongside him, but there was a general reluctance to extend the process of lustration further. As Elie notes, there was 'solidarity at the top of the party apparatus'.

The chapters also often highlight the very varied fates of returnees. Initially, rehabilitations happened behind closed doors, with little public explanation, but gradually communist leaderships across the bloc tried to offer a framework to make sense of the difficult encounters that resulted from the process. In doing so, they differentiated between the cohorts of returnee. In particular, it was the rehabilitated communist victim whose return was celebrated: the party member who had never lost his or her faith could be used as evidence of a return to Leninist

norms and a restoration of the party's honour. We find this rhetoric in 1956 Budapest, when Júlia Rajk addressed the Petőfi Circle;¹⁵ but we also find it adopted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, notably in the early 1960s with a kind of celebratory triumphalist narrative of the party's past deviations and subsequent recovery and rebirth.¹⁶ (There are echoes here of the kind of 'spiritual renewal' that Biess found in West German discourse about former POWs in the 1950s.) In practice, however, this did not translate into a life of privilege, even among former party members. A handful would be able to take up high-ranking positions within the party-state structure, provided they kept quiet about their previous experiences. Matthew Stibbe's chapter on the GDR includes the examples of Werner Eberlein who rose to be a member of the Politburo by 1986, and Fritz Globig and Adele Schiffmann who both received official honours post-rehabilitation, but this was not the universal experience. As Elie's chapter demonstrates, the Soviet government's secret 1955 decree gave very clear instructions on the rights that would be conferred on those rehabilitated, and he highlights their deliberately limited nature. There was no right to be given employment in the survivor's pre-arrest specialism, nor to have housing returned. Such problems were even more acute for the non-party victims of state terror, particularly those who had been subjected to mass deportations, as the chapter on Latvia amply illustrates. A kind of hierarchy thus emerged: a handful of party luminaries might be feted, but the vast majority or returnees found that life, even if rehabilitated, was very different from the one that they had known before their arrest. Amnestied prisoners were sometimes drawn into a transient underclass, unable to establish a settled existence after release.

It is easy to assume that in communist bloc countries, ordinary members of society were keen for a more committed and radical approach to rehabilitation denied to them by the communist regimes. But at least two of the chapters question such a view, instead suggesting that the difficulties survivors encountered in reintegrating were partly the result of social ambivalence or even antipathy towards their return. In Czechoslovakia, as Kevin McDermott and Klára Pinerová show, police reports frequently included expressions of alarm from citizens hostile to the returns; in the Soviet Union, we see similar anxieties. In both cases, we find some ordinary people hoping to preserve firm boundaries between themselves and those who returned (for example, the residents in Havlíčkův Brod, who proposed that all returnees should be removed to another housing estate). Some of this moral panic was specifically linked to the fact that the releases included non-political

prisoners alongside those we might more readily identify as victims of state repression: the fear of crime seems to have been particularly pronounced at the time of the amnesties.¹⁷ But it was more than this. As McDermott and Pinerová demonstrate, there was also opposition to the release of political prisoners: see, for example, the criticism articulated at the Tatra factory in Česká Lípa regarding the way 'workers remained in prison, while class enemies were set free'. As Amir Weiner's work on western Ukraine has shown, there could be quite violent conflict between nationalist returnees and those who had opposed them, or been their victims, in the 'post-World War II civil war'.¹⁸ In more muted forms, the archives often portray a widespread feeling of confusion and disorientation about what the whole process of de-Stalinisation meant.¹⁹ Such insights suggest that the reintegration of those who had been labelled as outcasts generated social dynamics that, even outside of communist party circles, were considered painful and even undesirable.

Where does all this lead comparisons with Western Europe? Much writing on de-Stalinisation expresses disappointment with the way the releases and rehabilitation were handled. The communist regimes ultimately failed to follow through on a process of reform that they launched in 1953. In many ways, such assertions are valid, as these chapters show. Undoubtedly, the reluctance to deal effectively with perpetrators was the result of the elites' desire for self-preservation. Rehabilitation was indeed slow, equivocal, haphazard and uncertain. The narratives of the violent past were inherently partial, for even when they did allow for the heroisation of certain victims, the figure of the perpetrator was invariably obscured, and the question of responsibility left largely unprobed. Practical efforts to reintegrate returnees were highly selective, and invariably partial. The process, begun in 1953, was often interrupted or even reversed, leaving many survivors and their relatives in a kind of protracted limbo.

Despite all this, we should perhaps be wary of seeing this entirely as a pathology of communism. As suggested in the chapters on Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, it was not only party leaders who exhibited reservations about (or even opposition to) the process of reintegrating groups and individuals whom they had once seen as outsiders and aliens. Moreover, for all European societies, the brutal but varied forms that political violence took in the mid-century have proven a problematic legacy and one whose commemoration and historicisation has taken numerous twists and turns. The case of Spain is perhaps the most telling: even after Franco's death in 1975 and the advent of

a democratic system, a 'pact of oblivion' was preserved, and only since the turn of the century has the violence of the civil war – and questions of guilt and responsibility – become a major topic of public debate and scrutiny, with an active 'memory movement' seeking to document the truth, often through the exhumation of bodies.²⁰ There were, of course, specific factors that made such dynamics even more troubled in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union – the vested interest of the communist elites, the size of the returning population – but elaborating restorative narratives of past violence that facilitate social cohesiveness rather than further division has proved a problematic task in many other political contexts too.

Notes

1. J. Winter, 'The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies', *Raritan*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2001), pp. 52–66. An excellent introduction not only to the contemporary significance of the war in European memory politics, but also the existing literature, is J. Wüstenberg and D. Art, 'Using the Past in the Nazi Successor States from 1945 to the Present', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 617 (2008), pp. 72–87. For the West European picture, see for example Pieter Lagrou, 'Victims of Genocide and National Memory: Belgium, France and the Netherlands 1945–1965', *Past & Present*, vol. 154, no. 1 (1997), pp. 181–222.
2. D. LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); D. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD, 2001); Robert G. Moeller, 'What Has "Coming to Terms with the Past" Meant in Post-World War II Germany? From History to Memory to the "History of Memory"', *Central European History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2002), 223–56.
3. Pieter Lagrou reminds us that the spectre of violent conflict did not abruptly disappear in 1945, but argues that it was largely transposed to the colonial territories, or to the margins of what was soon to be considered Western Europe (Greek civil war, for example). P. Lagrou, '1945–1955. The Age of Total War', in F. Biess and R. Moeller (eds), *Histories of the Aftermath* (New York, 2010), pp. 287–96, quotation at 288.
4. T. Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945* (London, 2005), p. 13.
5. P. Lagrou, 'The Nationalization of Victimhood: Selective Violence and National Grief in Western Europe, 1940–1960', in R. Bessel and D. Schumann (eds), *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 243–57, quotations at 252–3, 257.
6. R. G. Moeller, 'War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany', *The American Historical Review Publication*, vol. 101 (1996), pp. 1008–48.
7. F. Biess, 'Survivors of Totalitarianism: Returning POWs and the Reconstruction of Masculine Citizenship in West Germany, 1945–1955', in H. Schissler (ed.), *The Miracle Years Revisited. A Cultural History of West Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), pp. 57–82.

8. As Mark Mazower has written, 'Moderation was the new virtue'. M. Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London, 1998), p. 292.
9. S. Moyn, 'In the Aftermath of Camps', in Biess and Moeller (eds), *Histories of the Aftermath*, pp. 49–64.
10. P. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, MA, 2000).
11. Moeller, 'War Stories'.
12. E. Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–57*, trans. and ed. H. Ragsdale (Armonk, 1998).
13. K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, 2010).
14. T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010).
15. Nanci Adler explores how rehabilitated party members in the USSR often preserved their faith in communism, despite many years of imprisonment; in the Soviet context, however, they did not have quite the opportunities for public discussion of their experiences that were briefly available in Nagy's Hungary. See N. Adler, *Keeping Faith With the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag* (Bloomington, IN, 2012).
16. M. Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform After Stalin* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), Chapter 7.
17. M. Dobson, "'Show the Bandits No Mercy!': Amnesty, Criminality and Public Response in 1953', in P. A. Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: A Social and Cultural History of Reform in the Khrushchev Era* (London, 2005), pp. 21–40; M. Eli (Elie), 'Slukh o banditskom razgule v 1953–1954 gg.', in I. Narskii (ed.), *Slukhi v istorii Rossii XIX–XX vekov. Neformalnaia kommunikatsiia i krutye povoroty Rossiiskoi istorii* (Cheliabinsk, 2011), pp. 146–67.
18. A. Weiner, 'The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 78, no. 2 (2006), pp. 333–76.
19. P. Jones, 'From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin: Real and Ideal Responses to De-Stalinization', in Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, pp. 41–63; C. Hooper, 'What Can and Cannot Be Said: Between the Stalinist Past and New Soviet Future', *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 86, no. 2 (2008), pp. 306–27; K. E. Loewenstein, 'Re-emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 58, no. 8 (2006), pp. 1329–45; Iu. V. Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaia 'Ottepel' i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953–1964 gg.* (Moscow, 2004), pp. 154–98; Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, pp. 79–105.
20. J. S. Rubin, 'Transitional Justice Against the State: Lessons from Spanish Civil Society-Led Forensic Exhumations', *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2014), pp. 99–120; O. Encarnación, 'Reconciliation After Democratization: Coping with the Past in Spain', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 123, no. 3 (2008), pp. 435–59.

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